

Nintendo 64 ■ PlayStation ■ PC CD-ROM ■ Sega Saturn ■ Arcade ■ Mac ■ Online

36
pages of
exclusive
previews

NEXT GENERATION

July 1997

The world's #1
computer and
videogame authority

What makes a
good game?
The six things every title
must have

PlayStation's next generation arrives!

The most impressive 32-bit title yet?

Sony's **Blasto** shows off never-

before-seen PlayStation technology

volume three

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Blasto, a 3D action adventure featuring a bumbling superhero (with voice acting by Phil Hartman), should be an excellent game. But more importantly, it serves as an impressive demonstration of how much untapped power PlayStation has left. The story starts on page 56





Does **profit** equal **quality**?

According to the IDSA, the combined **installed base** for next-generation game machines (PCs and consoles) will be **over 50 million** by 1998. The U.S. game industry is poised to sell \$5.3 billion in software alone in 1997. **That's a lot of money for R&D** — and a lot for companies' bottom lines.

The slump of 1994 is finally over — good news for publishers. But what about consumers?

High sales figures don't necessarily mean high quality games. While Sony is willing to invest millions in upping the technology and gameplay ante on PlayStation with *Blasto*, many publishers, in response to today's increasingly hit-driven market, are far more likely to green light a clone of an established hit than to attempt something truly innovative. **Without creativity** games become stale, gamers become **bored**, and another **slump** (or crash) becomes inevitable.

It doesn't have to be that way. One reason the "hit or abject failure" dichotomy exists today is because so many inferior products are released. **When a project is commercially unsuccessful, it's often with good reason.** By simply releasing good games, whether it's (yet another) real-time strategy game or something totally new, **publishers could ensure at least solid sales figures.**

So what makes a good game? We can't provide the recipe, but the definitive **ingredient list starts on page 40.**

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July 1997

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Games are going to take over the world!

Or so says Sid Meier in this month's exclusive interview. One of the top five designers in the world waxes eloquent on games that women will play, why his new company Firaxis has no marketing department, and, of course, his new games



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What makes a good game?

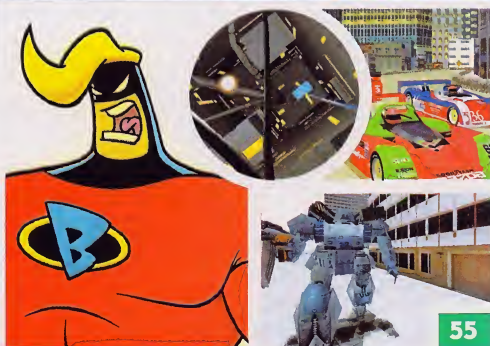
Next Generation pinpoints the six ingredients every good game must have. Plus, how do multiplayer games and single-player games differ in what makes them great? Everyone knows what games they like, but after this, everyone will know why as well



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Report from CDGC • Tiger's Game.com — first playtest • Consolidations — and layoffs — hit the industry, what does it mean for gamers? • New column, Toolbox, debuts



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Alphas: 18 games previewed

Games for M2, PlayStation, Nintendo 64, Saturn, and PC previewed. Each month, we take a look at the best games in development around the world and report the story back to you



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Finals: 33 new games reviewed

Every month, NG reviews each and every major new game release, so that you know which titles to hunt down at your local software retailer's store

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ng special

What makes a good game?

Ever wonder why some games inspire you and others leave you flat? We may not know if it's art, but we know what we like. This month, **Next Generation** takes a look at what works and what doesn't. We also identify the six essential elements every good game should have

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Alphas

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The most respected videogame website in the world. News updated daily (and every two hours during E3, July 19 to 21)

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The way games ought to be

Exploring the cutting edge with Neil West

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We separate the stars from the starving. Reviewed this month: *Dark Rift*, *Blast Corps*, *Bushido Blade*, *Triple Play '98*, *Tail of the Sun*, *Xenious 3D/G+*, *Zap*, *Interstate '76*, *Air Warrior II*, *MDK*, *Moto Racer GP*, *Theme Hospital*, *Street Fighter III*, and more

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If you've got fiber optics, you can send mail to us at the speed of light. Cool, huh?

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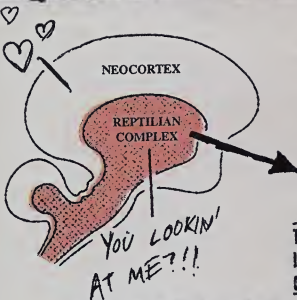
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Next month...

Next Generation #32 arrives on newsstands on July 22. Want to know Sega's future? Get **NG 32**

PEACE TREATIES. FAILED!
DIPLOMACY. FAILED!
PASSIVE RESISTANCE. FAILED!
LOVE-INS. FAILED!
THE PEACE CORPS. FAILED!
UNITED NATIONS. FAILED!
THAT GUY IN FRONT OF THE
FOLK SONGS. FAILED!
HEAT. MAYBE.





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WHAT'S SO CRAZY ABOUT PEACE, LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING?

THIS: AGGRESSION IS HUMAN NATURE! LET'S ACCEPT IT AND PUT IT ONTO THE NET WITH HEAT BEFORE MORE INNOCENT LIVES ARE TAKEN! ...HEAT IS THE ANSWER!!



TANK. FAILED!

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HEAT IS THE ANSWER!



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Next Generation editorial on an entirely new plane — the revamped Next Generation Disc expands magazine coverage with digital interviews, QuickTime movies, playable demos and a final reviews searchable database

ng disc contents



The Next Generation Disc enhances editorial breadth with multimedia flair

This page outlines some of the key new features found on the Next Generation Disc. Whether you enjoy testing product demos, viewing movies of gameplay, or meeting the people developing important game titles, the Next Generation Disc exists to satiate its users' gaming wants and needs.

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talking

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special

Armored Core, Heavy Gear, Nuclear Strike, Sonic World, Timulin: The Capricorn Collection

previews

Dark Rift, Human Grand Prix, Ball Blazer Champions, Gundam Gaiden II, Battlestations, Duke Nukem 3D, Metal Slug, Army Men, Dracula 64, Fighting Force, & more

mac

Damage Incorporated, FA/18 Hornet 3.0, Pegasus Prime, NG Screensaver

pc

Air Warrior II, Interstate '76, Theme Hospital, Pandemonium, NG Screensaver

finals

A searchable database of **Next Generation's** "Finals"

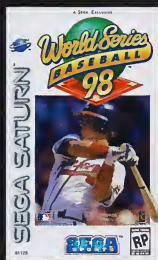
talking

See and hear Glen Schofield talk about *Gex: Enter the Gecko*

internet

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Sid Meier is the genius behind *Civilization* (the fourth greatest game of all time, according to **NG**'s Top 100 in issue 21). Having left Microprose, he's now started his own company called Firaxis and is eager to tell **NG** that...

Games are going to take over the world

Sid Meier is the game designer's designer. Although his name may not crop up as often as, say, Peter Molyneux, John Romero, or Richard Garriott, Sid is arguably the most respected PC game designer in the world (he's also famous for having founded Microprose with "Wild" Bill Stealey to settle a bet in the early '80s). A champion of gameplay over graphics, Meier titles such as *Civilization*, *Colonization*, and *Railroad Tycoon* created a whole new genre and paved the way for *Command & Conquer* and *WarCraft*.

Sid is now also leading a new trend — that of separating the process of game design from the business pressures of a bustling software house. Firaxis is his new company (with no marketing people) that has two new games scheduled for release “when they’re ready.” **Next Generation** caught up with Sid at Firaxis’s headquarters just north of Baltimore to talk game design, gameplay versus graphics, and how to attract 50-year-old women.

Ditching the suits

Sid Meir: Firaxis was formed about a year ago. The idea behind the company was to pull together a fairly small but experienced, and hopefully talented, design group to

focus on PC games. We're all from the entertainment business and up until now we've all worked in large companies. But the plan here is to simply concentrate on design, programming, and the creative process. And not worry about marketing and sales — these aren't our specialty, and they tend to, um, confuse things sometimes.

Sid: Well, there's some good news and some bad news there. [Laughs] When you're working in a large company, a lot of times what the marketing folks will ask you to make is last year's top-seller, but just a little better. Or last year's game with 3D instead of 2D, or 4D instead of 3D.

Sometimes that input is helpful, but it often tends to make you worry right at the beginning about trying to please somebody else. Whereas we're trying to find a topic that we ourselves get excited about and find a game idea that we would like to play. This way we'll make it a personal game as opposed to pleasing the





marketing people, the focus groups, or whoever else the marketing folks think the market is. We know that people who like the games we like will enjoy the game we've produced, and this has to be better than producing a game that we don't care for too much but have been told that some theoretical person might like.

Of course, there's always the chance that we're really weird and that no one else is going to like the games that we like. [Smiles] But we're willing to take that chance.

NG: How many games is Firaxis developing right now?

Sid: We're working on two games that are both designer based. I'm the lead designer and programmer on one, and Brian Reynolds who was the programmer and designer for *Civilization 2*, *Colonization*, and a couple of other strong titles is leading the other project.

NG: And what kinds of games are they?

Sid: We use the phrase "innovative continuity" to describe our products. In other words, if you're familiar with the games that Brian and I have created in the past [*Civilization*, *Colonization*, *Railroad Tycoon*, and so on], then you won't be shocked by the games that come out of Firaxis. But having said that, we've never done the

"People don't buy games based on development budgets. They buy games based on how much fun they are"

same product twice so these games will be new and innovative, but not shockingly so.

NG: Will they be out by the end of the year?

Sid: Maybe yes, maybe no. But we're happy with how they're coming along and feel we're making progress.

NG: And presumably you won't rush them out the door to make any deadlines?

Sid: [Laughs] No, that's another reason we've distanced ourselves from marketing and sales. We've found that a lot of products have really suffered from having been rushed out in time to make a deadline or in a specific quarter. We're not interested in doing that.

Graphics versus Gameplay

NG: Aside from cosmetics, how do you think games have become more sophisticated over the last five years?

Sid: There have been a couple of distractions, but gaming has mainly continued as it always has done. Every now and again a person or group comes up with a really neat idea, believes in it, and works on it out in the dark. It appears in the marketplace and then everyone says "Oh yes! That's what we wanted all along!" *Doom* was one example, and there are a couple of other games that have established a whole new genre.

I think *Civilization* was maybe that type of game. Before it came along, I remember talking to someone who said that "strategy" games were a dirty word! You didn't want your game to be a strategy game because people would think it was this terrible, boring game with this crude map and some big blocky things that moved around, and that you'd need a Ph.D. to play it. That was five years ago. But then a game comes along, *Civilization*, that is fun to play and all of a sudden you have a whole new genre. Usually, these big new genres don't require any new technology or some super high-speed processor, it's just that someone came up with an idea of a game that they wanted to play.

NG: So you're saying that the best games are the ones that designers make for themselves?

Sid: This is the way it's always been in the game industry, and it's been even more true over the last five years.

Five years ago people were talking about the new Hollywood and how CD-ROMs were going to turn movies into games and games into movies, and how we were going to need massive teams of artists and cinematographers to create videogames — and none of this has actually happened. This whole notion of games being dragged around by the technology hasn't happened. Through it all, games are still being led by game ideas, designers, and players.

There's always been the tendency to think that technology drives change in the game industry, but I don't think that this has ever been true. We did fun games with EGA graphics and 640K of memory in the early PC days. Every year it's virtual reality glasses, CD-ROM, 3D accelerator cards, or some other new technology that people think is going to take us to the next level, but ultimately it's always game design that helps us evolve.

NG: So do you think that the industry has finally learned that production values don't necessarily matter, and that it's gameplay that counts? Do you think that, for the time being at least, the whole "Sillicwood" infatuation of Silicon Valley and Hollywood combining and the dream of the big-budget "interactive movie" is over?

Sid: People don't buy games based on development budgets. They buy games based on how much fun they are to play. So now game companies realize that they can spend either \$5 million, \$1 million, or even just \$500,000 making a game, and looking at the sales figures over the last few years they've got to realize that there's no direct correlation between how much a game costs to make and how well it sells.

Now, of course there are some titles such as *Myst* and the *Wing Commander* series that cost a lot of money and returned a lot of money, but there are many more examples of games that didn't come close to recouping their development budgets. So companies are backing off from this big-budget blockbuster idea.

NG: So did players reject the whole "Sillicwood" notion?

Sid: Players didn't want movies. The idea five years ago was that if your game wasn't a movie, it wouldn't compete. It was thought that people would put up with games but really wanted movies. But as it turns

out today, people play the games and tolerate the movie parts.

NG: Would you agree that the game industry's wooing of Hollywood over the last five years is yet more proof that too many game companies value graphics and cosmetics over actual gameplay?

Sid: I definitely think that's true. I have to say that I'm a programmer and a designer — not an artist — so I want that to be true! [Laughs] But yes, the industry definitely spends too much time trying to add video or incredible graphics to its games.

Cosmetics aren't bad. But you have to remember that each game can only have a certain amount of resources and energy put into it. If you concentrate too much on the cosmetics, then inevitably there has to be less attention given to other aspects of the game. Certainly, we need graphics, we need a good interface, we need visual clarity for our information to come across, and we need graphics to do this. But when a designer is asked how his game is really going to make a difference, I hope he has an answer that talks about gameplay, fun, and creativity — as opposed to an answer that simply focuses on how good it looks or how fast it runs.

NG: And you think innovative gameplay will always more than compensate for a lack of flashy graphics?

Sid: Good games take place in the player's mind, not on the computer screen. We can never put images on a TV or computer screen that are as realistic or as vivid as the images that we can conjure in a player's mind once they start to get drawn into a game. So even simple graphics, when combined with good gameplay, are perfectly good enough; in this way, a programmer or a designer can "create" better graphics than any artist.

NG: So, again looking at the last five years, would you say gaming's adoption of CD-ROM is a blessing or a curse?

Sid: CD-ROM has been a curse in that it's kinda led people off in strange directions. But it's been a blessing in that it's a very economical distribution medium. Right before CD-ROM, we were getting to the stage where there were 10 or even 12 diskettes in a box and production costs were really going up. CD-ROM lets us include better sounds and soundtracks in our games — an area that had always been weak — and it has even led to a few appropriate uses of video.

But it's not been revolutionary at all. The people who have tried to deal with it as a revolutionary medium and have got caught up with the whole Hollywood model of things have really gotten themselves into trouble.

Persuading Mom to play games...

NG: Right now, one of the biggest debates going on in the game industry is how to make games appeal to a

wider proportion of the population. Certainly we're not appealing to too many 50-year-old women.

Obviously, it's in everyone's interest to expand computer gaming's appeal beyond that of young males, but there are opposing views as to the best way of doing this. The argument can be polarized into two opposing camps. First, there are those who believe that today's game styles and themes can resonate with broader

"Good games take place in the player's mind, not on the computer screen"

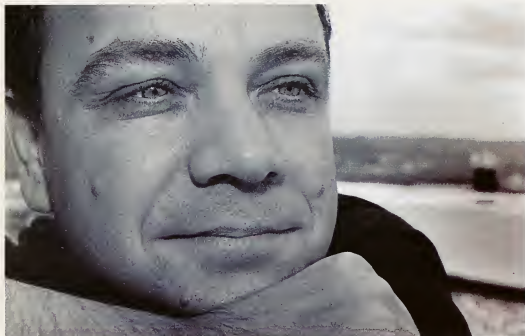
audiences, but they don't currently look good enough to be of interest to adults who are used to watching TV. Second, some argue that it doesn't matter how realistic games may look, the content of today's games is intrinsically interesting to only a small portion of the population. This second group concludes that we should work towards improving gameplay and content issues instead of merely cosmetics.

Which camp do you belong to?

Sid: I would definitely be in the latter category. Making



talking



our games look "more like TV" isn't necessarily going to make them more attractive to a 50-year-old woman.

Most games are written by males with a certain background and an interest in gaming; the games that they produce are going to appeal to other males with similar backgrounds and an interest in gaming. If I were to try to write a game for a 50-year-old woman, I'd immediately find myself in the difficult position of having to rely on marketing research and focus groups and some vague hypothetical construct of what I think this person might want to play to help me along. It wouldn't be a game I'd play, and so I don't think it could be a tremendous success.

NG: So what's the solution?

Sid: It's important to expand the pool of designers to include a broader range of the population if we hope to reach these new groups of the population.

NG: Can the growing online, multiplayer genre spread gaming's appeal to a wider audience?

Sid: I certainly think that online, networked, multiplayer games will appeal to a wider audience than the sitting-in-your-darkened-room-staring-at-the-screen kind of games. But we still have a long way to go.

I think if we were having this interview five years

"Games are going to take over the world, oh yes"

from now, we'd look back and admit that in 1997 we didn't know what these online games were all about. The big change over the next years will be the introduction of new genres dedicated to the online environment.

NG: Whole new game genres will emerge online?

Sid: I make the analogy that 15 years ago when computer games were becoming a reality, the first thing we did was to take existing games — which were predominantly board games and card games, such as *Scrabble* or *Monopoly* — and do computer versions of them. And we called these "computer games." But since then we've discovered that there are whole new kinds of games, such as *Civilization* or *Doom*, that work better on

a computer and can't be done with any other medium.

Right now the same thing is happening with online. Right now we're taking traditional single-player computer games, adding some kind of multiplayer component, putting them up on the networks, and saying, "This is multiplayer gaming." But I think a couple of years from now, we'll find that there's a whole different kind of game — and whole different game genres — that work in the online, multiplayer environment.

NG: Why can online multiplayer games appeal to a wider audience than today's single-player games?

Sid: If you're looking at a game that has, say, 1,000 players, then obviously not all those players can be the omnipotent, all-conquering hero in the traditional computer game sense. New types of games that require teamwork will emerge online. And right now maybe there are a whole lot of people out there who look at computer games but aren't interested in being the all-conquering, omnipotent hero. Yet they might enjoy taking on a different role or being part of a team — with real human interaction. Maybe these people will make up a large proportion of the audience for multiplayer games.

NG: Some games have already "broken through" into the mainstream. If you argue that gameplay counts more than graphics, how do you explain the success of such cosmetically rich titles such as *Myst* and *Seventh Guest*?

Sid: I'm not much of an expert on this, but I believe certain games become popular simply by being popular. Word of mouth starts to travel, people try it and are quickly impressed by a game, it gets a reputation, and then its popularity develops a life of its own. And sure, this is one way to break out into the larger market.

But all the people who tried to follow with *Myst* clones found that not only is it very expensive, but that *Myst* was a game that typically you only want to play once — you don't want to play it through twice and you don't want to play another version of it.

NG: OK, but has *Myst* been useful in introducing games to people who would otherwise never think to play one?

Sid: But these people aren't really gamers. A lot of people see people playing games, want to know why they're playing, want to know why they're having fun, and what's so great about it, and so they try for themselves.

And with a game like *Myst* they can understand it, play it, and say "OK, that was fun." But they're not really game players, and a game like *Myst* isn't going to convince them that playing games is something they want to be doing with their free time.

The future of gameplay

NG: Let's talk about the future of games. Most people realize the huge potential of an artistic medium in which the audience can participate. Do you agree that today's games really only scratch the surface of this potential?

Sid: Games are going to take over the world, oh yes. It's going to take a while, but there's something inherently more engaging and more entertaining about computer games than there is about any other form of entertainment. It's really the only non-passive form of entertainment, except for sports and certain "indoor activities" in which people can be entertained and participate at the same time. But yes, we are still at the very earliest stages of what we can do, and we have a long way to go.

NG: How excited are you about "interactive entertainment's" future?

Sid: I'm very excited. Although in the long, long term I almost worry about it being too entertaining! We could almost get to the point where we could seriously say

that we have a medium that's twice as entertaining as TV. If you think about how much people watch TV...

People could spend twice as much time playing games as they do watching TV. That's a scary proposition. NG: Would this make you feel guilty?

Sid: [Laughs] I don't know, I mean I wouldn't feel guilty about stopping people from watching TV, but I think that at some point we have to become responsible.

I'm actually kind of concerned about this now with some of the games that are out there. I don't believe in censorship, but I think game designers need to be responsible and think about the effect that they are having on players — especially younger kids. Now it's time for us to think about who we are, what we stand for, and what messages are we giving to our players. Because let's not underestimate our influence — we are really engaging them with our games.

Basically, it's just a function of us having been so small for so long. Previously we haven't been called to this responsibility. We've always believed that we've been this small niche and that we're only addressing people who felt the way we do. But as we think about becoming a larger form of entertainment and grabbing larger and larger audiences, we need to think about our responsibilities some more.

NG: Has this become a concern of yours because suddenly games are reaching more people, or because you feel the content of games is actually getting worse?

Sid: I think it's becoming worse. A certain segment of the industry has got itself locked into simply trying to out-gross, out-gore, and provide more shock value than the products that have gone before them. I mean, we've had spines ripped out, how can we top that? The question in a lot of designers' minds seems to be whether or not his game can be more violent, more radical, more

outrageous than the games that have gone before it.

NG: Isn't this giving the audience what they want?

Sid: Sure, a lot of games are marketed purely on this fact. And hopefully, this is a short-lived trend because people will realize that if the focus of the game is just on the blood and the gore then there's probably not that much to the actual game.

Anyway, I think it's a poor way for a designer to be successful, and it means that when a newcomer comes to the gaming industry and flicks through a magazine he or she is going to wonder what it is that we're saying.

NG: So given that, despite all of its successes, the game industry seems to be hung up on cosmetics instead of

"I tell designers, don't try and do better graphics than the movies because you're always going to lose"

gameplay and remains infatuated with immature subject matter, will the "interactive entertainment" industry of the 21st century evolve from the game industry? Or will it be stolen from under our noses?

Sid: Right now, we know how to do interactivity. But we're perfectly capable of dropping the ball and letting someone else pick it up.

The game industry has to be best positioned to manage this opportunity because we know that magic ingredient is interactivity. But we have to concentrate on this. I tell designers, "Don't try and do better graphics than the movies because you're always going to lose. Don't try and do better sound than what you can get on CDs, because that's not what we're good at. What we're good at is interactivity — so make your product win, lose, stand, or fall based on its interactive content."

So I think game designers are in the best position to step in and provide the interactivity for these new forms of entertainment, but I know plenty of other people would like to get involved.

NG: What advice would you give to new game designers?

Sid: It's always fascinated me how we can do very, very difficult things on a computer that don't impress people, and then we can do things that are very easy to do on a computer and they do impress people. There's not necessarily a correlation between how much work you put into something and how much it impresses people.

I was always struck by the old *Space Invaders* coin-op that had those big weird blobs moving across the top of the screen. Today, we could program that in a day, but people actually thought that they were really invaders from space and it was very exciting. Then on the other hand, you could spend six months programming a computer model of a human body to move very realistically — it's very hard to do — but then people would look at it, be interested for about three seconds and go, "Big deal. It's a guy walking across a screen."

So my rule is to think about how much work you have to put into something and how much it will impress not another programmer, but a gamer on the street. They're the ones you have to impress.

ng





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"The ability to zoom in from a mile away within the sniper mode is remarkable."

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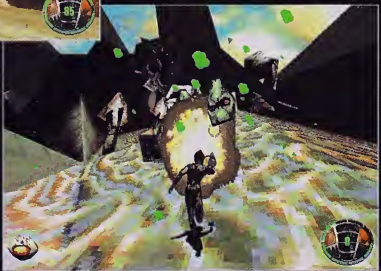
"One of the most innovative games ever created."

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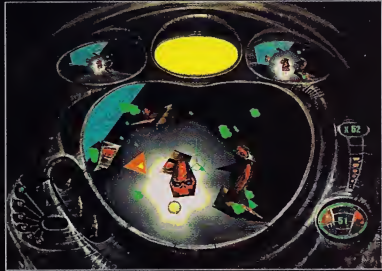


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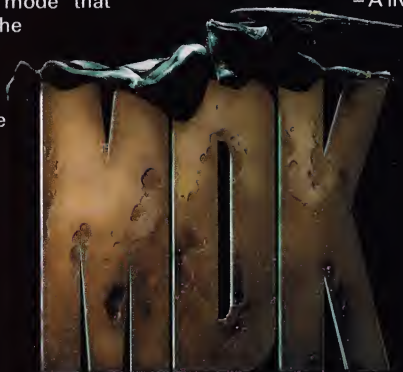
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CGDC: The low-down on the Computer Game Developers' Conference • **Corporate Restructuring:** Interactive spring-cleaning for the industry • **Game.com:** Tiger's new handheld — a Game Boy for the '90s? • **Toolbox:** A new column — this month, we look at **Lightwave 5.5** • Plus, **Joyriding**, **Arcadia**, and **Movers and Shakers**



News from all over — Disneyland, Silicon Valley, the land of fiber optics



CGDC in Santa Clara: Geeks get down

Developers gather at the Santa Clara Convention Center

While late-night parties kept conference-goers up all night, the show's celebratory spirit didn't prevent this year's Computer Game Developer's Conference (CGDC) from being a true meeting of the minds for game developers — and "suits," as the

Tipsy attendees went from the floor to Intel's spotlight awards

show's focus expanded to include seminars on topics (like marketing) well beyond the conference's original focus.

The CGDC hosted an all-day class on Friday April 25 on managing game development. The classic conference classes (April 25 to 29) covered everything from programming and production to business concerns and legal issues pertinent to the industry. Also, several roundtables focused on issues of game design and the future direction of gaming. Keynote speakers at the show included John Romero, Chris Roberts, and Nolan Bushnell. Intensive two-day tutorials focused on object-oriented game design, creating online games with Java, Softimage development tools and techniques, and 3D Studio Max. One-day tutorials covered OpenGL, Windows programming, Debabelizer, and modeling.

Several related events enriched this year's CGDC. 3DFx hosted



More attendees, and less goatees, than ever were at the 11th annual CGDC. Estimates put the total attendance at around 6,300 people

Immersion '97 to help developers "master the magic" of its Voodoo chipset; TEN hosted a developer day with sessions zeroing in on server architecture, its SDK, and other enabling technologies; and Microsoft got in on the action and capitalized on the presence of so many developers convened at one place with a DirectX 5 seminar held the day after the show (April 30) at the Santa Clara Convention Center. To get a beta version of DirectX 5, visit www.directx.com.

The show wasn't all serious developer talk, however. On Sunday night, various companies' hospitality suites provided booze and an ideal opportunity to schmooze.

The gossip, networking, and "casual" business talk that happens in the suites (and at the hotel bar afterward) is well worth the price of admission.

On Monday night, the exhibition floor was similarly flooded with cocktails. Tipsy attendees went from the floor and onto the Multimedia Theatre where Intel sponsored the Spotlight awards (see sidebar). *Quake* picked up two awards (for sound effects and best online/Internet game), and *Super Mario* won in three areas (best use of innovative technology, best console game, and best game of 1996). Sony's *Carnival* followed the awards ceremony which found many developers working on the logistics



CGDC crowd (top). San Francisco Rush kept gamers going (bottom)



Microsoft's construction site promoted Sidewinder (top). One gamer played Mace all day (bottom)

of gorging on cotton candy and talking about z-buffering.

The CGDC show has been criticized since changing hands a year ago. Formerly put on by Computer Game Developers' Association (CGDA), the CGDC was known as a small homegrown operation nurtured by the tight-knit game developer community. The first annual CGDC was a group of 20 people (basically the CGDA) gathered in a living room. Although CGDA has always held and continues to hold a stake in the proceedings, in 1996 Miller Freeman Inc. took over the show. Many bemoaned the inevitable "growth" that MFI meant for the CGDC, arguing that heavy traffic would ruin the independent feel that was once so integral to attendees' enjoyment of the show. The 1995 show (pre-MFI) saw 2,200 people, and MFI grew the 1996 show to 4,000.

The 11th annual CGDC this year featured expo-only attendees for the first time—4,000 conference goers and an additional 2,300 expo-only visitors attended—bringing the total numbers to 6,300. The CGDC was definitely more crowded this year and had a more corporate feel. While there were still a good amount of tie-dyed tee shirts and goatees, the attendees this year were more tame and less colorful than those in attendance in previous years. Still, more people isn't always a bad thing, and most attendees **Next**


Generation spoke to were enthusiastic about the benefits of the conference.

As was expected, Ernest Adams donned his top hat and suspenders

This year's CGDC was more crowded than in previous years

and announced that he is resigning from his volunteer post at the CGDA in order to devote his full energies to Electronic Arts.

The show floor was twice as crowded with the number of exhibitors doubled since last year. While conferences and hospitality suites often find developers for competing companies comparing notes, swapping gossip, and (sometimes) exchanging resumes, the mood on the floor is less friendly. Still, it was nearly impossible for competitors to avoid each other on the exhibition floor. Matrox, S3, 3Dfx, ATI, and Nvidia were all crowded into one area, while the two force feedback companies (Immersion showed a promising force-feedback future with its I-Force 2.0, and Microsoft) were likewise tightly grouped. Two multiplayer players—TEN and Rtime—were also cozy neighbors. Of course, 3Dfx, MMX, and DVD seemed to be everywhere. PowerVR demoed a high-resolution version of *WipeOut XL* which ran at 1024-by-768 using Direct 3D. And San Francisco *Rush* was all the buzz as attendees competed at arcades near the entrance to the show floor.

Southern California will be the site of next year's conference and show, which will be held in Long Beach. The Long Beach dates are set for May 4 to 8, 1998. Part of the reason for the move is that show is committed to building stronger ties with the entertainment industry, expect more suits and style next year. To counteract the glitz of Hollywood, the show will return to Northern California the year after. The 1999 show will take place at the San Jose Convention Center on March 15 to 19 (tentative dates), so hopefully the dawn of the millennium will bring the spirit of the CGDC back where it belongs. 

Spotlight Award Winners

Best Games, Technologies and Craft Implementation of 1997
Best Pre-rendered Art:

Zork Nemesis
Best Animation: *Tomb Raider*
Best Adaptation of Linear Media: *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream*
Best Script, Story or Interactive Writing: *You Don't Know Jack XL*
Best Use of Video: *Wing Commander IV*
Sound Effects: *Quake*
Best Use of Innovative Technology: *Super Mario 64*, for the N 64
Best Console Game: *Super Mario 64*
Best Simulation Game: *Mechwarrior II: Mercenaries*
Best Music or Soundtrack: *Quake*
Best Strategy/War Game: *C&C Red Alert*
Best PC/Mac Game: *Civilization II*
Best Arcade Game: *Virtua Fighter III*
Best Educational Game: *Freddi Fish II*
Best Action Game: *Duke Nukem 3D*
Best Sports Game: *NHL Hockey '97*
Best Adventure Game/RPG: *Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall*
Best New Technology: N64 from Nintendo
Best Trivia or Puzzle Game: *You Don't Know Jack XL*
On-Line/Internet Game: *Quake*
Best Game of 1996: *Super Mario 64*



TEN sponsored a *Quake* tournament. Here, id founder John Romero tries to impress a TEN employee and onlookers with his *Quake* skills

Cleaning time: Corporations slim down

With numerous companies spring-cleaning for the long haul, many are asking: is the Interactive gold rush over?

During the months of April and May, a number of publishers and developers underwent a form of spring-cleaning. While there may have been numerous cutbacks, canceled projects, job losses, and shut-downs, the game industry seems to be settling into better defined business models.

On May 3, in response to '96 fiscal losses of \$221 million, Acclaim initiated a pre-E3 housecleaning. The company laid off over 115 employees, amounting to 15% of its work force. According to Acclaim, some early, unannounced works in development

The industry is settling into better defined business models

have been discontinued during this restructuring. The stock market responded positively with shares moving up sharply at the news.

Several weeks before, Disney Interactive laid off 100 temporary and permanent staff members over the course of three days in mid-April. Disney itself claims that only 20% of its nearly 435 permanent staff have been laid off. A Disney spokesperson offered, "After having an incredibly successful business with rapid growth, we have re-examined our business strategy against the current marketplace, given all of the industry consolidation and competition for shelf space at retail."

As Disney rethinks its strategy, the company will be scaling back production from 15 to 20 titles per year to 10 to 12 titles per year. The major difference is that Disney will be "partnering" with developers rather than doing the development in-



Westwood president Brett W. Sperry (center) is now also Virgin's president of publishing. With Sperry, Westwood VPs Steve Wetherill and Louis Castle

house. "For our games business we will still be actively involved in story creation, creative oversight, and things of such nature," offered a spokesperson. "The actual programming and development of the physical game will be handled by one of our partners."

Disney and Acclaim may have downsized, but BMG Interactive has all but shut down its U.S. operations. Unfortunately, this comes at a time when the company was poised to debut some strong products. Early statements from BMG speculated that the company may become some kind of affiliate label, but with only a handful of staffers left after the layoffs of April 22, this is doubtful. It appears that most the U.S.

rights to upcoming titles will be sold off to other publishers.

Unable to find more financial backing, or a publisher to ally with, Rocket Science shut its doors in April as well.

While some publishers look to leaner business models, others such as Capcom are retrofitting their internal development. After cancelling the two internal projects, *Major Damage* and *Werewolf*, Capcom has brought in David Siller to head its U.S. research and development department. Siller, a former producer at Universal Interactive, was one of the members of the *Crash Bandicoot* design team as well as the man behind such SunSoft mascots as Aero the Acrobat and Zero the Kamikaze Squirrel. While Siller is head of Capcom's R&D



BMG titles *SpecOps* (top) and *Major League Soccer* are possibly up for sale



department, some restructuring of the department is slated but exact details are currently unavailable.

In a similar fashion, in May Virgin announced a new President of Worldwide Publishing, Brett W. Sperry. Sperry, who has the unenviable task of stopping Virgin's red ink hemorrhage, will now pull double duty, as he's also the President and CEO of Westwood Studios, which he helped found in 1985. "The trick is to empower the right people," Sperry says of his new role, "and give them the resources and flexibility to get the job done. You also try as quickly as possible to identify those people who are not right."

The man who commands at Westwood has conquered all of Virgin, as Sperry is now responsible for all the projects coming out of Virgin's five development studios, including the problematic Burst, which is the company's U.S. internal studio. "The way the Burst studio was structured made a lot of sense on paper," Sperry concedes. "But for a variety of reasons, it wasn't delivering product at the end of the day." And while there were some layoffs centered around the cancellation of *Propaganda* (a mission-based driving game), Sperry is confident in the studio's upcoming product line and seemed amused at the recent speculation that the company was running out of capital. While he noted the company will look more strategically at the market, Virgin has announced that it will be shipping more than 25 new games in 1997 and 1998.



Capcom's *Major Damage* didn't make the cut. The U.S. internal studio is restructuring

On April 4, Crystal Dynamics also announced a new president, promoting Rob Dyer from his senior vice president position. During a major down-sizing last year, Crystal Dynamics abandoned their publishing efforts and has since concentrated strictly on development. The company had been functioning without a president, as CEO Ted Ardel managed day-to-day operations as well as the company's relations with venture-capitalists. While many naysayers believed the end was near for Crystal last year, it appears they are the first to reemerge as a smaller but more streamlined operation.

April capped off with several reports of significant growth in the game marketplace for 1996, with one report predicting a 20% gain for 1997. While the game industry has bloomed again with the next-generation systems, the competition is tougher than ever, and some growing pangs are inevitable. With no room on the shelves for pork products, leaner and more defined business models for publishers and developers can only add longevity and stability to an industry, which, to date, can't boast much of either.



In the studio

A Next Generation look behind the scenes...

Earthworm Jim 64 developed in Europe? At press time, creators of the 16-bit Jim, Doug TenNapel of the *Neverhood* and Dave Perry of Shiny individually confirmed that they were meeting with a European development house to discuss the deal. The meeting puts TenNapel and Perry back on the same side of the fence for the first time since TenNapel left Shiny to launch the *Neverhood*.



Sony's *Rally Cross* team is back on the track. According to a source inside Sony's San Diego studio, it's not a sequel, but a "licensed racing game."

The classic collections keep on coming, as Midway plans both another Williams and Atari collection. A company insider notes that the next Williams compilation tentatively includes *Moan Patrol*, *Joust II*, *Spy Hunter*, *Burger Time*, *Tapper*, and two never released titles by Eugene Jarvis and Larry DeMarr entitled *Splot* and *Blast*. As for the next Atari compilation, the disc looks to feature *Road Blasters*, *Gauntlet*, *Crystal Castles*, *Paper Boy*, and possibly *720*.

More *Turak* is on the way, as Sculptured Software is currently conducting tests to see whether *Turak* can faithfully be translated to PlayStation. According to Acclaim, PC owners should be receiving at least one version of *Turak*. One is expected to be a strict conversion of the Nintendo 64 game, while another may include new levels, network modes and more. It is extremely likely that 3Dfx-enhanced versions of the game will be featured prominently. Also, *Turak 2* for Nintendo 64 is in design stages at Iguana. No expected release dates have been made available for any of the titles.



GT Interactive took advantage of the Computer Game Developers' Conference to announce the sequel to *Duke Nukem 3D*, entitled *Duke Nukem Forever*. This sequel will feature a true 3D environment built with Id Software's *Quake II* engine. *Duke Nukem Forever* will continue to have the same realistic, interactive environment as its predecessor, while adding the advantages of true 3D levels. Many features of the *Quake II* engine are not fully ready at this time, so the *Duke* team will be developing for the existing *Quake* engine, and adding the updates as they are finished. While enhanced, the new engine should not require deeper system requirements than the existing engine demands. Much of the story has already been written, and work is being done to have the title ready for summer '98, so it will not conflict with *Prey*, 3D Realms's other big title.





An original PlayStation™ game starring Bruce Willis as your virtual partner

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H O L Y S E

Game.com: Will it beat Game Boy?

Next Generation gets the first hands-on test drive of the new
Tiger Electronics handheld



Tiger Electronics's Game.com is roughly the same size as Sega's Game Gear. The default opening screen shows the built-in features, which can be accessed either by using the joystick and buttons, or the touch screen and stylus

Titles available at launch:

Lights Out (pack-in)
Batman & Robin
The Lost World
Williams Arcade Classics
Wheel of Fortune
Indy 500

Available by the Holidays:

Internet Cartridge
Sonic Jam
Duke Nukem 3D
Jeopardy!
Name that Tune
Wheel of Fortune 2
Mortal Kombat Trilogy
NBA Hang Time
Madden Football 98
Fighters Megamix
Tiger Casino
Henry: The Match the Sounds
Memory Game
Quizwhiz Cyber Trivia

Tiger Electronics is mostly known for its line of handheld, dedicated LCD games, mostly based on licenses like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. However, by the time you read this Tiger will have released Game.com, a new cartridge-based handheld meant to compete directly with Nintendo's Game Boy.

In the interest of trying to put a dent in that segment of the market, the overall design philosophy is one of low cost: the LCD screen is black and white and unlit (out of consideration for battery life as much as cost). However, the screen is larger than the Game Boy's, and is exceptionally clear with a nice resolution. The unit is roughly the same size as a Sega Game Gear, although thinner, and fits comfortably

enough between the hands. It features the usual joystick and four buttons, but the LCD also functions as a touch screen interface, and the unit comes equipped with a stylus for precise pointing.

Built-in software includes a calculator, solitaire, a phone number and address database, and a calendar (which is just that: a calendar, not a day planner or anything fancy). It features the usual jacks for headphones and AC adapter, as well as a comm port for connecting the unit to a phone plug (more on this later). Game.com also comes with the puzzle game *Lights Out* as the pack-in, and the whole thing retails for \$69.95.

One of the most noticeable features of Game.com is that it can

use two carts at once. The unit showed to Next Generation came with playable beta versions of *Indy 500*, a racing game, and *Wheel of Fortune*. Also shown were non-playable demos of *Batman & Robin* and *Duke Nukem*. *Indy 500* was less than exciting, although *Wheel of Fortune*, with an interface designed around the stylus and touch screen, was much easier to play than any version previously available for consoles and handhelds. The demoed *Batman & Robin* was a typical side scrolling action tie-in, but *Duke Nukem* looked quite promising.

According to Allen Richardson, a producer at Tiger, Game.com is based around a CPU, "in the Z80 family." Although unable to specify the unit's specs, Richardson did admit, "It's not really a 3D machine

SCEA to pick up Porsche Challenge

The highly rated European game developed by Sony U.K. had oddly languished in limbo for months until SCEA decided to pick it up for release in the U.S. Ship date is tentatively scheduled for August.

Nintendo disappoints everyone with annual results

Nintendo Corporation saw profits fall to \$848 million dollars (¥101 billion), that's down 13.7% from the previous years. Nintendo claims the shortfall is due to costs incurred launching the system, although the drop is more than analysts had expected.

Pentium 2 flaw

Errors in the floating-point sections of the chip put egg on Intel's face. Certain operations produce incorrect error flags, and others fail to produce error flags when they should.

EG Coverage on NG Online
Bi-hourly updates July 19 to 21
at www.next-generation.com.

— the 3D in *Duke* is simulated."

Nevertheless, the demo was impressive. *Duke* also highlighted one other Game.com feature: a liberal use of voice samples, unusual for a hand-held, cart-based system.

Perhaps the most interesting cart that will be available, however,

Perhaps the most interesting cart available is the Internet Cartridge

is Game.com's *Internet Cartridge*. For \$19.95 (modem and Internet account are extra), the cart enables the user to send and receive e-mail, and perform some other limited, text-based Internet functions. Unavailable for testing at press time, *Internet Cartridge* should be on the shelves by the holiday season (see sidebar). Most other Game.com titles are various ports of titles from other consoles, and while some third parties have expressed interest in developing for it, so far Tiger has no plans to sign any on.

Overall, Game.com gives the impression of value for money. Carts are in the \$19.95 to \$29.95 range, with five titles available at launch and another thirteen by the end of the year, including *Madden Football '98* and *Fighters Megamix*. Richardson says, "Since our carts are in the 16 Megabit range, *Madden* will probably

be the toughest title to do. We're also trying to do something more with *Megamix* than turn it into a 2D fighter." However, with no *Tetris* or other clear killer app (with the possible exception of *Internet Cartridge*), it remains to be seen whether the aging Game Boy is under any immediate threat. On the other hand, Tiger plans on staging the largest marketing blitz in its history this fall, and Game.com will be available in most retail electronics, toy, and hobby stores. We wish them the best.

ng

Intel and Microsoft Enter the arcade fray

Intel has announced its plans for a new arcade architecture that it hopes will allow far more players to participate in the arcade market. Previously, proprietary hardware from the likes of Namco, Capcom, Midway, and Sega has allowed few developers entrance. But through the use of a PC-based architecture and taking advantage of the advent of cheap but powerful 3D accelerators, Intel and Microsoft envision a new paradigm in arcade development.

The initial design specs for Intel's arcade unit call for a Pentium II at 266MHz minimum. A 400MHz variant is also planned, as are dual or quad

processor configurations as required. The 3D graphics subsystem currently in use is based on the 3Dfx Obsidian class boards, previously used only in high-end workstations.

Developers accustomed to designing for the PC and working with Microsoft's DirectX APIs should now be able to get their games easily and cheaply into the arcade. Microsoft and Intel claim this is something of a "movie-industry" model. Just as feature films are shown on the big screen with a videotape release some nine months later, developers are expected to debut their games in the arcade with

home conversion for PC expected some time later.

This would give arcade operators cheaper systems to buy, which can then easily have hardware upgraded or new games added any time. This is an attractive solution to arcade operators at a time when Model 3 hardware generally costs upwards of \$14,000 per unit.

With the advent of Intel and Microsoft's vision, the arcade industry is at a crossroads. It must decide whether to pursue the older, expensive, proprietary hardware or some new, cheaper, open standard that may not necessarily provide the horsepower to

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Intel's new standard could open arcades

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Toolbox

breaking

NEXT GENERATION JULY 1997

The latest upgrade from Newtek, Lightwave 5.5

Alias Wavefront and 3D Studio MAX may take the technological high ground in the ever-growing field of CG graphics, but for sheer ubiquity, no package beats Newtek's Lightwave. Its wide range of features, relative ease of use, and low cost (right around half that of 3D Studio MAX) have made it the favorite of workaday Hollywood effects companies and game developers. TV shows like "Babylon 5," "Xena," and even "Baywatch," have sported Lightwave CG

images, and it continues to be the workhorse modeling and animation program for numerous developers like Westwood and Sony.

Lightwave has always given a lot of bang for the buck. It may not do everything well, but it does seem to do practically everything, from a full set of the expected modeling tools (extrude, lathe, bevel, Boolean operations, and so on), to a MetaNURBS modeler (which makes modeling organic shapes easy but is not true NURBS), bones and inverse kinematics, lens flare, particle systems, some built-in image processing, and support for most of the more popular image and 3D object formats. Newtek's latest rev, Lightwave 5.5, boasts a number of improvements and added features. With any package of this complexity, it can take months or even years of use to figure out what works, what doesn't, and how best to use every feature, but our initial impressions are

very positive.

Lightwave splits modeling and animation into two separate programs, Modeler and Layout respectively. This is somewhat old school and mildly counterintuitive — textures are added in Layout, for example, not Modeler. Another minor annoyance is the menu system which, although easy to understand and streamlined a great deal so that no function is more than a button or two away, still means that just about every function is a button or two

away. Get used to those keyboard shortcuts.

However, 5.5 has appreciably sped up nearly everything, reducing rendering times and IK computations, and now supports Direct3D in addition to OpenGL. It also sports a number of new "gee whiz" features like a Morph Gizmo that makes facial animations a whole lot easier, by allowing artists to model several extreme expressions for a given face, then just use a series of morph control sliders to govern how fast the expressions change and how far along the extreme they go, or even blend two or three. An enhanced version of 5.0's image processor, Cel Shader, called Super Cel Shader, allows rendered images to be output so they look like cel animation and even, if desired, anime-style cels.

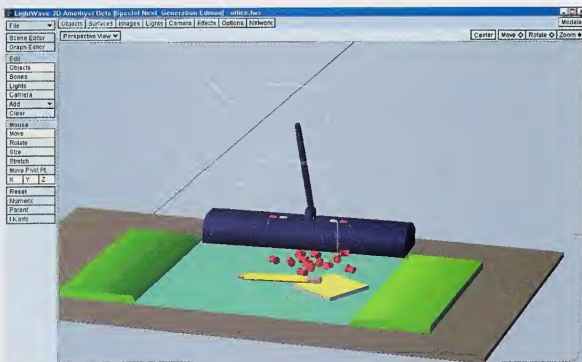
Overall, Lightwave 5.5 is not without its quirks, but it's nearly impossible to find a more comprehensive package, especially at the price.

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This new column in **Next Generation** is dedicated to covering the products that build your favorite games



This image, *Office Stress*, was produced in a few hours by a Next Generation staffer using Newtek's Lightwave 5.5



The Layout interface for 5.5 has been significantly streamlined from 5.0. A row of buttons along the top brings up sub-menus, while buttons along the side control more general functions

Over \$50,000 in cash and prizes for your best game

Fuseworks, an Ottawa-based online technology company, is offering \$25,000 for first prize in its game development contest. The contest will run through September 30th. Second prize is \$10,000; third is \$5,000; and ten fourth prizes are worth \$1,000 each.

To enter the contest, you must use Fuseworks's new Software Development Kit, which is available for download free from their web site (www.fuseworks.com). The SDK is designed for ease of use in creating unlimited-player online games, run in a frame through a web browser.

Both Corel (sponsoring the contest) and the Canadian government (funding Fuseworks's R&D) have a stake in the free SDK and its free server, so expect Fuseworks to stay on the cutting edge of web technology.

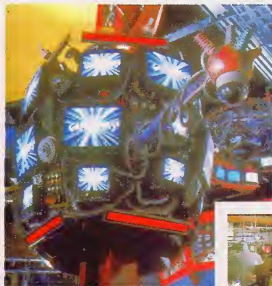
Arcadia

The latest arcade and coin-op news

Arcades are Bustin' Out All Over

Steven Spielberg's first "location-based entertainment" (LBE) site is up and running in Seattle...and it's got all the hype and excitement of *Jaws*, *Indiana Jones*, and *E.T.* rolled into one. Called Sega GameWorks, this 30,000-square-foot dreamland could be described as a \$10 million mega-arcade for the 21st century.

Spielberg's studio, DreamWorks, is a founding partner with Sega and MCA in the GameWorks joint venture. The Oscar-winning movie director recently explained his videogame background to *USA Today*: "In the 1970s while we



The loading dock (right) and video cluster (above) show the technology at GameWorks

were filming *Jaws*, Richard Dreyfuss and I would sneak off the set and spend hours at the local arcade playing *Pong*. As the technology and games became more advanced, so did my interest."

But Spielberg & Co. felt arcades didn't keep up with the evolution of video technology and excitement. The guiding vision at GameWorks is to close the gap and create the ultimate gamer's environment. "Playing," said Spielberg, "is about fun, excitement, competition, and bringing people together. It's also about escape, adventure, and connecting. It gives each person the chance to prove that he or she is a star."

Outside, GameWorks/Seattle looks like a funky old industrial factory. Inside, space is divided into three "zones"—each with different theming, lighting, music, architecture, and decor to support a variety of moods and experiences.

The "Loading Dock" looks like an underground nightclub; the latest games are unloaded right off the truck and "audience tested" by the club's hard-core gamers.

In the "Arena," visitors will experience a hi-

tech 3-ring circus atmosphere, complete with enormous video screens on all the walls. Top players will see their own live images televised on these screens as they play current games and unique signature attractions like "Vertical Reality," a sort of zippy elevator-chair/multi-level game/ride/experience. A mezzanine bar provides an overview of the whole Arena.

Upstairs, visitors can chill out in "The Loft," a quieter area with fun food and adult beverages (Starbucks, a microbrewery, gourmet pizza, and Cheesecake Factory desserts). The Loft features a jukebox, classic arcade games from the early '80s in oak cabinets, sports table games like air hockey, pool, and foosball, board games like chess, and Internet terminals—all presented amidst wooden floors, comfortable chairs, and a controlled noise level to allow ease of conversation.

GameWorks is aimed at the 18-and-up crowd looking for a quality entertainment environment. Gameplay is \$1.25 per shot, paid via smartcards. Special attractions like Vertical Reality may cost \$3 or \$4 per play. The company plans to open two more this year (a 40,000-square-foot site on the Vegas Strip and a 30,000-square-foot

place in Ontario, CA), with a goal of 100 GameWorks worldwide by 2002. That will require opening a new GameWorks every six weeks from Jan. 1, 1998 to Dec. 31, 2002—at a total cost of over half a billion dollars, even if they only cost half the price of the Seattle unit.

D&B: Go West, Young Gamer

Dave & Buster's is the adult playground that every arcade wants to "grow up and be like." This popular chain of location-based entertainment centers started in Dallas; now it has 10 stores nationwide. They are usually about 60,000 square feet and feature a deluxe arcade, upscale billiards, "just for fun" gambling, a fine restaurant, casual diner, a handsome bar, and myriad other entertainment choices under a single roof.

Its latest unit opened in Ontario Mills, CA; two more D&Bs are planned for this the U.S. year and one will open overseas. The Ontario and Dallas sites, by the way, feature a new D&B attraction: CyberPak, a new virtual reality technology which D&B co-founder Dave Corriveau calls "a new look and a high level of immersion in VR gaming." The first CyberPak game is called *Alpha 1 Rescue*.

by Marcus Webb

Marcus Webb is the editor of *RePlay* magazine



"Everbody Wants Inta Da Act"

Jimmy Durante's line applies to LBEs. Besides D&B and GameWorks, several other leading corporations have LBE plans on the drawing board. Such as? Disney, Sony, Brunswick, and—believe it or not—Wal-Mart.

- Disney won't comment for the record, but industry buzz says it's planning a chain of family entertainment centers to be called "Disney Quest." A lavish video arcade is expected to be a major component. (By the way, the 24,000-square-foot Club Disney site which recently opened in Thousand Oaks, CA, is a "mommy & me"-type children's entertainment center with not a single arcade videogame to be found, though it does have some Internet computers to keep daddies entertained. Disney reportedly plans to build 100 of the Club Disney stores, too.)

- Sony Retail Corp. (based in Burbank, Calif.) will soon open a four-story flagship LBE in San Francisco, with a chain of others to follow, reliable sources report. Sony's been working with Namco (America's biggest arcade operator) on its PlayStation technology, but we haven't heard any hints that Namco might be involved with Sony's LBE plans.

- Brunswick, famed for recreational goods for pool and bowling, has opened a huge site in Alberta, Canada called Red's. We're told it is themed like the "ultimate 1950's rec room" with plenty of videogames and sports games on hand; adult beverages and food are served. If it's a hit, more will follow.

- Wal-Mart is teaming up with a national cinema chain, Carmike Cinemas, to open family entertainment centers called "The Hollywood Connection." They're starting this summer with a 69,000-square-foot site in a former Wal-Mart store in Goshen, Indiana. Two more should follow in the Midwest by next year, says Carmike. If the partners like the results, they'll roll out Hollywood Connections nationwide. Our guess is many of these super-arcades could go into former Wal-Marts, since the company is reportedly consolidating its retail chain a bit.

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Joyriding

Gaming on the Internet

When talking about online gaming, most people focus upon individual services, what games they have, and their revenue model. These are clearly important, but it pays to look deeper and check out the technical hurdles a service must overcome. There seems to be a level playing field for these companies because they are trying to deal with the same problems but are often approaching it in completely different ways.

Many LAN games require all clients to sync for every frame, but this is impossible online

Higher bandwidth modems (28.8K and above) can add additional latency through the compression and decompression of data. Each pass through a modem can be as high as 40ms — giving a total of more than 160ms just for the data to pass from client to ISP and back on a round trip. To make matters worse, congestion points at MAE East and MAE West (major hubs on the Internet where major providers' backbones interface with one another) can add even more latency. Currently both MAE outlets are estimated to drop more than 20% of packets sent through them, requiring a resend, thereby doubling the latency of those packets. Imagine telling your friend that you never received the letter that was sent to you a week ago and asking for another to be sent. This is exactly what happens when packets are dropped.

Current online gaming services (such as Mplayer and TEN) house their servers on a single backbone. Clients using the same provider as these services will get better performance because they don't have to pass through the MAE connections (and other congested intersections) to pass from their ISP's backbone to that of the service. Essentially, a somewhat proprietary network is required for the best performance. While this isn't a major problem if your provider is connected to the same backbone as your service, it can considerably restrict the true potential market of customers for these services. Heat is taking an interesting position of setting servers on a variety of provider backbones. In this way, it hopes to

provide a decent level of performance for more ISPs. Naturally, this action is more expensive, but Heat is betting that the increase in cost will pay off in terms of quality of play. Time will tell.

The major obstacle arising from disparate latencies is client synchronization. Many LAN games require all clients to sync with each other for every frame, but this is impossible when faced with the latencies associated with the Internet. The solution to this is decoupling

the network update from the frame update, but this requires the use of a global timebase to determine which network packets arrived on time. The client must "smooth" animation to cover up the true position of an object and the perceived position. One example is in TCP/IP Quake where the aiming of discrete weaponry (shotguns) is difficult because the perceived location of your enemy is not accurate. Thus non-exact weapons (rocket launchers and grenades) are often the weapons of choice because players only have to aim in a general area.

Adding further to the confusion for developers is the fixed frame rate issue. For example, if someone on a Pentium 200 is playing

Over 800 developers and 500 organizations have signed on to Rtime's developer program

another client on a Pentium 100, there are three possible solutions. Either the high-end machine has to be crippled to match the low-end machine, or the low-end machine must have a substantial drop in detail or resolution to match the frame rate of the high-end machine. The final solution is abstinence — not allowing the two platforms to interact — which is not a solution at all. Clearly, developers have many obstacles to overcome when designing for internet gaming.

At the CGDC, Rtime proposed a somewhat different approach to each of these problems and a revolutionary revenue model — developers and publishers starting their own online gaming mini-services similar to Battle.net or Westwood Chat.

by **Christian Svensson**

Christian Svensson is the editor of **Next Generation Online**



Rtime's background is in large-scale military simulations that generally can accommodate upwards of 600 players. It seeks to take its experience in this arena and put it into better internet gaming while turning a tidy profit. Rtime has come to the same conclusion as many other companies, but its solution is somewhat different. Other services seek to take a sector of the internet and run a service, but Rtime contends this method is inconvenient for the customer (either having to switch ISPs or suffer poor performance), limits sales potential, and costs service providers too much.

So Rtime has introduced a four-pronged solution consisting of a client/server architecture, a new "affinity-based" data distribution method, dynamic motion updating in conjunction with a global timebase, and low-bandwidth requirements. The client/server architecture is not unlike other solutions on the market. Each client in an Rtime game opens and closes a single connection to the server. The server acts as an intelligent network switch that coordinates the clients' communications. The benefit is gained by adding servers in other geographic areas.

As an extension to the architecture, Rtime's affinity data distribution method uses "filtering templates." Rather than a static, centralized approach to affinity definition, Rtime lets the client set its own affinities. Multiple templates can specify multiple affinities based on geographic location, priority data-type, and user-defined subtypes.

The Rtime server analyzes all incoming data for affinity-based distribution and has been designed to be quite efficient at deciding which data to send and when to send it.

The dynamic motion modeling is nothing more than estimating where an object will



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Lara Croft, gaming's #1 covergirl.



breaking

Movers and Shakers

The business news that affects the games you play

be at the time of the next network update using velocity-based "dead reckoning" or path-based motion updates. Either way, the client uses a global timebase to let clients run asynchronously (without handicapping). As an update is sent, the Rtime engine automatically timestamps the update with the current global time. That timestamp is carried to the other clients and used to properly model an object's trajectory.

According to marketing data compiled by Rtime, online gaming service providers need to generate approximately \$2 an hour revenue from customers. Exactly how that revenue is generated is irrelevant. Of that \$2, the average developer or publisher receives between \$0.20 to \$0.50 an hour. Another \$0.15 an hour is dedicated toward distribution (marketing, promotion, infrastructure, and so on). The remaining \$1.35 an hour goes back to the gaming service.

Rtime's proposed model for publishers to set up their own service is considerably different. Rtime uses the same base of \$0.15 an hour for distribution costs and factors in another \$0.15 an hour for billing costs. Where Rtime gets its money is at a \$0.10 an hour licensing charge per user from the company using its technology. This leaves an additional \$1.60 an hour to the publisher.

Currently over 800 developers and 500 organizations have signed on to Rtime's developer program. These companies that may not necessarily ever use the Rtime technology, but they are interested in the directions it is going and the future developments of the technology.

Right now, only three of Rtime's customers are expected to deliver commercial products during 1997, but many more are expected for 1998. Renavent will be releasing a multiplayer RPG entitled *Ascension: Myths and Legends*. JAGware will be releasing a multiplayer space combat sim using Direct 3D. VR Tech is the final company to have a product on the market using Rtime in 1997 that will be some variety of helicopter sim, but most details surrounding the game are still unknown.

Rtime's technology has yet to really be proven in a large-scale test on a blockbuster game, but its technology and business models seem sound. This technology (or something very similar to it) could factor largely into the future of the online gaming community. *Next Generation Online* will be watching closely to monitor its progress, and of course will keep you up to date.



by Colin Campbell

Colin Campbell is the editor of *Imagine Games Network*

**DOOM! ALL DOOM**

NEWSLINE: It was carnage as usual in the industry this month with big names dropping out of key markets. BMG closed down its U.S. office and slunk back to Europe; 3DO sold off its hardware interests to Samsung; and Rocket Science simply ceased to be.

BOTTOMLINE: All this bad news usually heralds the appearance of ashen-faced "crash-mongers" forecasting more 1983-style holes in the desert and the end of videogaming. Fact is, like specks of iron to a magnet, gamers are increasingly sliding over to hot products and leaving the unattractive sadly alone. The difference between a hit and a miss is so wide now that one disappointing game with high expectations (e.g. *Rocket Jockey*) is enough to flounder great ambitions. Meanwhile, videogaming is due to grow by another 20% this year. See story on page 22 for more detail.

HELLO SEGA

NEWSLINE: Some people are wondering if Sega is awake anymore. No amount of flapping hands frantically over its motionless eyes will raise the once vibrant giant from its slumber. In a month when information on its new hardware platform leaked into the public domain and Saturn sat precariously under the \$199 guillotine, the company managed to only stare silently into space.

BOTTOMLINE: Sega: It's time to go to work. The long-rumored price drop to \$129 needs to happen sooner rather than later. And pretending to ignore that we all know all about Black Belt will not make us forget its existence.

NINTENDO'S BRITISH INVASION

NEWSLINE: Britain is one of those little countries that can't get enough Nintendo. So there was some bitterness there when the beloved Big N introduced Nintendo 64 at the

equivalent of \$400, only to drop the price after one month to \$300.

BOTTOMLINE: So, either the plan all along was to take U.K.'s Nintendo-crazed early adopters for a pretty pound while the machine was super-hot, before dropping to a reasonable level, or Nintendo heard the cries of the faithful and dropped the price quickly. Either way, British gamers are not happy at the high premium they had to pay (against the U.S. price of \$150).

MPLAYER'S FUTURE SEARCH

NEWSLINE: Internet Partnership Of The Month? MPath and Intel teamed up to offer support to any game developers hoping to create true Internet games.

BOTTOMLINE: MPlayer is already deeply involved with developers in an attempt to make sure all relevant commercial games have multiplayer capabilities. While the future of that market still may be the domain of the publishers themselves, it's up to MPath and other online game providers to keep looking for more options.

BIG DEAL THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN

NEWSLINE: T+HQ has decided against publishing Psygnosis games for Saturn.

BOTTOMLINE: Remember all the fuss in 1995 when Sony subsidiary Psygnosis warned it would be releasing its PlayStation games to Saturn? Psygnosis Saturn games to date: Only three in the U.S.

ORIGINAL SINS

NEWSLINE: Believe it or not, 80% of PlayStation games sold belong to only three genres.

BOTTOMLINE: That's right. A full quarter of all PlayStation titles are racing games. Sports make up 35%, and fighting 19%. And you wonder why there's no originality?

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After all, chasing a squirrel up a tree is good for kicks, but it hardly compares to a fight to the death with 800 pounds of bazooka-toting alien muscle.

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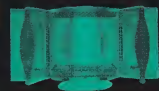
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What makes a good game?

Videogames, like music videos and digital movie effects, are a modern-day art. Anyone who doesn't believe that should stop reading right here. As with any art, good and bad examples abound. This month, **Next Generation** explains what it takes to be good.

What makes a good game? **Next Generation** has isolated six elements found in every successful game throughout history. When considering games, or anything else, as an art form, it's important to recognize that these elements are more easily spotted than executed, and we aren't suggesting that simply knowing what it takes to make a great game guarantees good game design. Of the millions of people who have picked up a paintbrush or a guitar or sat at a typewriter, only a few have succeeded in creating great art. Knowing and doing are two separate, equally vital skills. Inspiration is obviously another matter to consider.

Good game design is about achieving a certain harmony through the use of all available elements, and it takes an artist to create this kind of harmony. The following

special feature only aims to list and describe the elements of a good game — it's up to the talent and skill of a great designer (and programming and art team) to put them together in a successful mix.

An important distinction to be made at this point is the one between single-player and multiplayer competitive games. The following text deals only with single-player games unless otherwise noted, because the source of competition means that very different dynamics exist in these two kinds of games. In a multiplayer game, the balance is found somewhere between the various players' skill levels; in a single-player game, this responsibility rests squarely on the computer AI. For a brief description of what makes a good multiplayer game see "What Makes a Good Multiplayer Game?" on page 44.





ng special

Good game design is balanced

Balance is at the heart of prominent eastern religions, a blessing to athletes, and absolutely essential to good game design. Balance hangs in the shadows of all great games and proves itself the backbone of any successful project. Balance makes a game feel right and can rescue a mediocre concept, while a lack of balance can dash against the rocks a brilliantly conceived notion. It's the unseen force that raises you up, beats you down, sends you away in anger, and brings you back for more. More than any other element, it's the quality that makes you feel good about playing a game.

Looking at how balance applies directly to videogames is not easy because it often represents the sum total of many elements we will explore, and it's sometimes not until the end that a well-balanced game reveals itself

Nearly every game starts off with at least some part of it not being possible, the clever part is how the design changes in the finished game.

— Adrian Smith, Operations Director, Core Design (*Doom*, *Raiders*, *Thunderdome*)

as such. *Super Mario Bros.* was challenging, but with each level it became evident that the game was not unfair but rather prepared players for the next level. In doing so, the game never forced players into situations they weren't ready for. This is only one specific kind of balance, however. Whereas *Mario* maintained a consistent challenge throughout a very long and involved game, balance is just as effective in a racing game such as *Manx TT* which offers a host of motorcycles with different strengths and weaknesses so that each player can find a comfortable fit.



Tomb Raider uses a sophisticated sense of balance that successfully shifts from action to puzzle-solving as the game progresses



Balance is found most specifically in the AI. In a multiplayer game, the balance is struck by the opponents' skill levels and thus can be perfect or totally out of whack, but in a one-player game it has to come from the computer AI. In *Tomb Raider*, if the challenge of the first few levels had been much more than just figuring out how to navigate the terrain, then

Pre-design your game before you start development on it. This will allow you and your team to have a strong set of goals.

— John Romero, President, Ion Storm (*Doom*, *Wolfenstein 3D*)

players would probably never have enjoyed the later levels as much as they did.

Tomb Raider represents a fairly unusual use of balance. Whereas most games spend their time trying to teach players one basic skill and to control the challenge level of that skill throughout the game, *Tomb Raider* lets the first part of the game be devoted to light



As *Doom* taught people how to play a first-person shooter, it kept its lessons easily digestible and encouraging

Poorly balanced gameplay and pacing are the most common mistakes in game design.

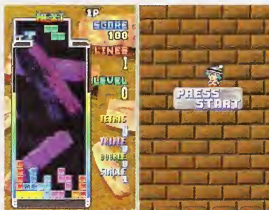
— Richard Garriott, President, Origin (*The Ultima Series*)

exploration and balanced that against a more challenging puzzle aspect at the end of the game.

Conversely, in *Mario Kart 64*, no matter how well you race in one-player mode, no matter how far ahead you get, if you slip up at all you get passed. The game cheats. There is simply no worse way to "balance" a game (and no better way to ensure that gamers tire of it quickly).

A game with balance never leaves players spluttering, "That wasn't fair!" as they throw the controller to the floor. Instead, good balance carefully, and according to plan, doles out appropriate challenges and rewards on the way to its conclusion. This does not mean that the rewards should be million-dollar FMV sequences. In fact, a carefully balanced game is satisfying without any fancy extras. Balance is probably the one game design element that cannot be faked and comes only through careful planning, mathematical reasoning, and most of all play-testing until the game testers cry uncle. It's a part of game design that can never be solved by throwing money at the

project or tossing in unnecessary features; in fact, it's exactly this kind of frivolous approach that often delivers an unbalanced game. In the end, making a balanced game is less art than hard work and simply represents the answer to some of the most basic questions in game design: Is this necessary? Is this fair? Does this feel right?



A big part of the success of *Tetris* stems from the game's ability to control the pace and balance of its challenge

Good game design is creative

One might think creativity would be integral to all serious game design, but sadly, the lion's share of titles today are seriously lacking in it. Game design, like much popular entertainment, has fallen into a serious rut of formulaic despair, with any innovation (like *Command & Conquer*) followed by endless repetition. Only real creativity, not "it's like 'game x', but..." derivatives can overcome this industry shortcoming. Creativity should also be a part of the game's challenges — expect more of players and they will, in turn, appreciate the game as something special. Finally, creativity is only properly received if it's delivered in a game that makes sense and is more fun because of it. Certainly, some games with the



designers want to keep players' attention (and business), they will have to think of new and exciting ways to challenge them. There is nothing worse than picking up a game that promises a new gameplay experience only to find out it's the same old game with fancy new

Stay away from the marketing department. Stay away from the marketing department. Stay away from the marketing department.

— Travis L. Williams, Executive Producer, ASC Games (*Street Fighter II Turbo*, *X-Men: Children of the Atom*)

right stuff at their core lack the confidence and the means to deliver their message, and so never make themselves known as great.

Historically, intelligence and creativity have walked hand in hand — great thinkers such as Thomas Edison certainly proved this. A handful of designers have been willing to take similar chances. But when 99% of all games delivered to market today are fitting neatly into one of about eight well-defined genres, it's tempting to believe that most designers and publishers are taking the easy way out — waiting for a visionary to establish a new set of rules for each generation and then copying them until the concept runs dry. We've seen it a million times — id creates *Wolfenstein 3D* and suddenly we're faced with countless clones. The world needs followers as much as leaders, but in an art form limited only by the designer's imagination, the game industry has an inordinate number of followers. A creative surprise is almost never a bad thing and should be a priority for every game designer.

A creative touch is most recognizable in the specific challenge of the game. In the early days, it was enough to simply make the player jump across a tar pit onto the heads of crocodiles or navigate a forward-scrolling landscape, but players are growing up. If game

graphics. On the other hand, there's nothing better than expecting the same old thing and getting surprised by something totally unexpected and clever. A game such as *Jumping Flash!*, for example, took what was already a tired format (the first-person shooter) and made something completely new and innovative — and people

With so many titles being forced on the shelves, you need to be innovative to be noticed, you need to be revolutionary to sell.

— Howard Schwartz, Executive Producer, ASC Games (*Alien Trilogy*, *NBA Jam Extreme*)



The *Jumping Flash!* series took a familiar genre and changed the dynamic with one simple innovation — the jump

What is the reason to design games if you can't do something new?

— John Romero, President, Ion Storm

fell in love with the game because of it.

Another element necessary to creative design is the ability to bring the original features to the forefront in an almost casual manner. It's one thing for a "smart" team to dream up a list of clever game ideas, but without the ability to integrate them into a game that makes sense and feels natural, they are of little use. If these ideas end up buried deep in the game or tacked on at the end, then the effort was pretty much in vain. Ultimately, taking the risk is worth it, even if it means several failed attempts.

While it can be argued that early game designers were more creative because standards had not yet been established and there was good territory to mine, creative thinkers in today's industry have an amazing opportunity. With an entire generation of players familiar with what it means to play a videogame, designers no longer have to worry about "babying" them and thus are free to raise the bar on what can happen in a

The bulk of poor titles last year are a result of the new demands created even proven teams off guard.

— James Goddard, Chief Planner, Dead On Design (*WeaponLord*, *Street Fighter II Championship Edition*)

videogame. This could easily provide the setting for the most exciting advancements in gameplay yet. In the end, producing a creative game is a matter of wanting to do something new and challenging and then making it work.



Nights successfully offered a whole new gameplay challenge within the comfortable confines of the platform genre

Good game design is focused

Some of the best games were made great by maintaining a very rigid focus on what made the experience enjoyable. *Tetris* is the obvious example of a game with focus. It contains no frills, no FMV intro sequence, no real change in gameplay from beginning to end, and yet it is still one of the most fun and successful games ever. But this is the literal approach of focus, and there are as many interpretations as there are success stories in the videogame industry. When used properly, in fact, focus has very little to do with repetition (as in the case of *Tetris*) and much more to do with keeping a tight reign on the game's purpose.

The idea is simple: decide what's fun about the game and make sure the player is



exposed to it at all times. Is it fun to break away from a heart-pounding action game to watch a long and meaningless FMV sequence? Absolutely not. An excellent example is in *Wipeout XL* where the enjoyment is in the racing, and so everything else in the game,

It's very simple to copy others' ideas — that's development. Coming up with new ideas is research and can't be scheduled.

— Kerry J. Ganshky, CEO/Founder, High Voltage Software, Inc. (NBA Hangtime, Tempus 3X)

such as the vehicle and track select screens, has been streamlined so that the player can spend as much time actually racing as possible. But it goes beyond that. What's specifically fun about *Wipeout XL* is more than just the racing — if that were the only thing then it wouldn't stand out above any other racing game. What's fun about *Wipeout XL* is the future/fantasy aspect that creates the

Good game design is eternal;
new hardware is temporary.

— Howard Schwartz, Executive Producer, ASC Games

unique control of the game and offers a long list of incredible, futuristic weapons. Where a game such as *Wipeout XL* succeeds is in its ability to bring to the forefront all of these elements and not get hung up on unnecessary extras. Could the designers at Psygnosis have taken a month of precious development time dreaming up ridiculous features that allowed players to customize the finish on their vehicles or draw funny pictures on the billboards? Of course they could have, but that would have been one less month concentrating on the things that really matter in the game.

With the arrival of 3D gaming and specifically 3D environments, game designers are faced with several new challenges in keeping their games focused. The main problem is one of freedom and how to offer it — or at least the illusion of freedom — without



To avoid the loss of focus in the age of 3D, some game designers have resorted to putting their games on invisible tracks

What Makes A Good Multiplayer Game?

The online gaming revolution is upon us and games may never be the same. After years of creating games primarily for one player, designers are now struggling with the brave new world of multiplayer games. But while everyone is jumping on the multiplayer bandwagon, only a handful of designers have really

caught on, and for every success story there are several failed attempts. So, what keeps the great games out of the bargain bin and on your hard drive?

Speed

Probably more than anything, multiplayer games have to be fast. Speed does not necessarily mean that the action itself has to be fast, but rather that the game should be efficient in the way it deals with a multiplayer scenario. While this is not typically a problem for console players crowded around a single

television, it is a serious issue for computer games played over a modem or the Internet.

For games to stay in sync, every computer (client) must be able to send its game state information to a host machine, which then sends out the relevant information to everyone else. This means if the red player in *Doom* shoots a rocket at the green player, the host machine must get the information and send it out in a timely manner: before the blue player escapes through the door.

This is accomplished by

ensuring that every time the player's machine sends updates to the server, it only sends relevant information such as location, direction, and momentum — not things like what team the player is on or the player's nickname.

Advanced Interaction

You can get some satisfaction by shooting opponents and scoring points. But you can get much more enjoyment if you can also completely humiliate opponents in the process. For example in *Doom*, when you shoot

creating a sloppy game. When designers first realized that they could create a world in which a character could be led around anywhere, many of them thought that was enough to make a fun game. But the truth of the matter is, it's not fun just walking around a 3D environment; if it were, people would walk around their office buildings or schools all day long having fun. What is fun is having the

is about and never lets them down. This does not mean that a game has to be about the exact same thing from start to finish, but that it should establish a goal or a set of goals and set off on a clear path toward achieving them. Focus is what keeps a player from ever having to say: "I hate this part! Why on earth would they put this lousy shooter in the middle of my adventure game?"

One of the most common mistakes in game design is trying to incorporate game elements that are not true to the main focus of the title.

— John Romero, President, Ion Storm

freedom to move anywhere in a 3D environment and finding yourself enticed down a particular path that is specifically designed for enjoyment. A focused 3D game will always make it clear where the fun is and will never mistakenly value wandering around for 15 minutes, just for the sake of freedom, for fun.

Focus, in the end, is the quality that keeps a player interested in the game throughout. It's the quality that lets players know what a game



While some games have successfully employed elements such as FMV, extras often distract from the focus of the game

3D is a neat feature, but things are getting ugly as the player's eyes clear from the initial 32-bit glitz and are screaming, "Where is the gameplay?"

— James Goddard, Chief Planner, Dead On Design



Wipeout XL is an example of a game that knows what it's about and stays focused throughout

opponents, they pretty much die and that's it. But in *Duke Nukem 3D*, you can freeze them solid, then walk up and kick them into tiny ice shards or shrink them into a tiny six-inch figure and watch them scurry around before you stomp them. In *Rocket Jockey*, you never actually kill opponents, but you can yank them off their rocket cycles, drag them across the arena, and tether them between two poles. To be truly successful in a game centered around the interaction between players, that interaction needs to be both advanced and

inventive. Simply shooting opponents is fine for single-player games when you're dealing with hordes of AI drones, but when players are willing to work hard to best a clever human opponent, a good game will give them the tools to do it with.

Focused Gameplay

Some older network games require everyone to gather in a chat room, decide who's going to play, and then simultaneously launch their game. If one player drops out, the whole tedious

process has to begin again. A much better example for good multiplayer game design is *Quake* or the more recent *Interstate '76*. People can jump into a running game at any time, or quit whenever they want, without crashing the game server. The result: any time, day or night, hundreds, if not thousands, of people are playing *Quake* on the Internet. The easier you make it to get into a game, the more people will play it.

Another way to keep things easy for people is by

keeping the design uncluttered. Most people play multiplayer games as a quick way to blow off steam — they don't want to invest a weekend just trying to figure out the basic rules. Throwing a bunch of extraneous power-ups, play options, and extra units into a game isn't going to make a weak design any stronger — no more than it would in a single-player game. The classic example is *Bomberman*; it has an extremely simple multiplayer formula that's also one of the best.

Good game design has character

It's important to distinguish the difference between overall character in a game's design and a character in the game. In an ideal situation, the two support each other, but one can exist without the other (both successfully and otherwise). A game like *Soviet Strike* has a cold and impersonal helicopter as its lead character, but the game itself is drenched in a distinct style that makes it nothing short of captivating. And in *Quake*, the character is nothing more than a forearm.

On the other end of the scale, countless movie license titles begin with extremely strong lead characters but go on to deliver the ultimate in bland, boring, character-free games.

Of course, one of the big components of a game's character are the actual characters in the game. What die-hard Nintendo fan, after all, can't recite by name every incidental enemy in Bowser's army? And how many *Virtua Fighter* fans aren't perfectly willing to believe that their favorite characters really exist in some alternate universe? The point is, games with fully developed character (including,



Mario 64, even though the jump from 2D to 3D graphics changed the look of the game quite dramatically. It worked, in the end, because the game's creator and audience understood what the character of a *Mario* game was all about. Part of that was the character of *Mario*, but just as important was the overall feel of the game.

If designers would concentrate on making a complete world, they would be amazed at how these (gameplay) solutions just appear.

— Travis L. Williams, Executive Producer, ASC Games (recently *Turbo, X-Men: Children of the Atom*)

I would like my games to be remembered for the quality and richness of their stories.

— Richard Garriott, Producer, Origin (The Ultima Series)

when appropriate, fully developed characters) are the ones we remember and revere. They are the games that smack of care, planning, and vision. Character is also the quality that enables a series such as *Mario* to be upgraded from system to system without ever losing its original charm. Think about how natural it all seemed to see the lush environments in *Super*

As gaming hardware becomes ever more capable of hosting amazing graphic environments and sound libraries, limitless new opportunities exist to fully develop a game's character. This is not to suggest that a game has to include remarkable graphics to have character — just look at *Tail of the Sun*. But today's technology enables designers to create games that are truly representative of the details in their heads. And so an idea, be it visual or otherwise, no longer has to be

because of them. When Sonic first faced the screen and tapped his foot in displeasure at having been left unplayed for too long, gamers instantly understood what the character of a *Sonic* game was all about. With that one little detail, the entire series was enhanced (and a new generation of imitative "idle animations" was launched). The personality of a game is similar to the personality of a human being — a "good" one can inspire instant affection, while a "poor" one can kill a relationship before it's even started. This is why developing thorough and likable character in games is key.



A game like *Super Mario 64* is instantly recognizable and enjoyable because of the deep and consistent character of the series



Technological advances let today's designers give their games exactly the kind of character they pictured in their heads



Sometimes it's something as simple as *Sonic* impatiently tapping his foot that gives a game its distinct personality

Good game design has tension

The important difference between an action movie and an action game is that movie viewers know the protagonist will come out on top in the end, and thus any amount of tension caused by a belief that he or she may not ultimately succeed is simply part of the process. In a game, however, the hero only wins if the player is skilled enough to make it happen, and this creates an amazing opportunity for game designers to develop real tension.

The first time players encounter a zombie in *Resident Evil*, inevitably their blood starts pumping, a few stray shotgun blasts fly off in nervous haste, and finally the fatal shot is delivered to the head. With that simple encounter, most players are hooked. Tension



in action games such as *Tomb Raider* or puzzle games such as *Tetris*, some genres require a little more sophistication in their delivery — but it's still every bit as important to find a place for it. In a driving game, for example, tension comes from good competitor AI as

blown to bits. Even the turn based games (the good ones) provide the tension inherent in the thought, "what do I do now?" In the end, tension in videogames gives the player the chance to act out the final scene in every great action/adventure movie — the scene in which the hero's back is against the wall and everything seems to be working against him or her, but suddenly, to the disbelief of all watching, he or she manages just one last trick and wins one for the good side. A great

The first time I played *D*, it was a stormy night and I had the light out. I opened a door in the game and actually screamed.

— Howard Schwartz, Executive Producer, ASC Games

doesn't require an action game, of course (just as other genres of movie can provide far more tension than an action movie). Remember waiting for a long thin piece in *Tetris*, as your pieces stack closer and closer to the top? Or waiting for the right animal in *Baku Baku* to implement a devastating combo?

Tension has been found in great games throughout history and has been missing from the worst. It makes you pause the game every few minutes to take a deep breath instead of turning the game off after the first few minutes because you just don't care to play any longer. The idea is simple — make the player care about the goal of the game and then threaten to take it away. This can be done countless ways, but the best games manage to do it better than others. Take for example one of the many generic side-scrollers of the 16-bit days. The formula approach was to throw tons of mindless enemies at players until they finally got worn down enough to loose a life, then have the process start all over again. But it would take a screenful of these enemies to equal the intense pressure created by just one of the hideous flying demons in *Tomb Raider* which taunt and lure the player into a lengthy battle of give and take.

While it's easy to see how tension works in

players are heading down the final stretch, neck and neck with a car that is actually trying to run them off the road or force them into the high side of the final curve. In a story-reliant game, diminishing time is always a good source of tension; if players don't crack the puzzle to open the locked door in time, they will be

We now have the tools to create complex games that have amazing graphics, speed, and audio. It's all up to game designers to use these assets efficiently.

— John Romero, Chief Planner, Dead On Design

designer knows how to place the player in this situation and how to provide that last trick for players to discover at the right moment while making them feel they did it all on their own.

I have high hopes for breakthroughs in AI and voice recognition and think these technologies can lead to smarter games.

— Helmut Kobler, President, Cyclone Design



One of the most dramatic examples of tension in a videogame is found in the slow and determined pace of *Resident Evil*



Simply by limiting the number of enemies in the game, each battle in *Tomb Raider* becomes a tense and meaningful situation

Good game design has energy

Done right, a videogame can bring to life an entire world. These games have a real sense of energy — the kind of games that make you forget to check the clock until the wee hours of the morning or rejuvenate you after a hard day at work or school. But this quality doesn't have to come from the obvious kind of explosive force found in a fast-action shooter such as *Quake* or a high-speed racing game such as *Rage Racer*. In fact, energy can just as easily be expressed in a complex adventure game that carefully

I think, for a while, publishers cared more about good-looking than good-playing.

— Travis L. Williams, Executive Producer, ASC Games

Making games is a creative endeavor. If you're doing anything at all original, it's an organic, figure-it-out-as-you-go process.

— Helmut Koblitz, President, Cyclone Design (Battle Sport, Capash Quasar)

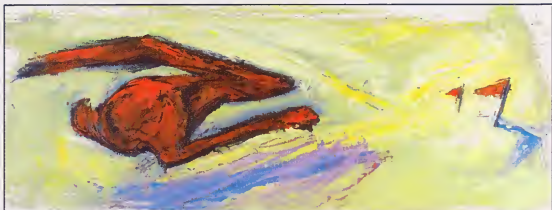
leads players from one clue to the next until suddenly they are just one step away from cracking the code on the flying machine that will take them to the next level. Energy in videogames is all about movement, momentum, and pace; the best game designers know exactly how to exploit it and infect players with the game's spirit.

We've all experienced the unpleasant

I just want people to think my games are fun. Isn't being damn fun perfection enough?

— Helmut Koblitz, President, Cyclone Design

phenomenon of popping a new game into the player and anxiously awaiting the big thrill ride promised on the box only to be greeted by a flat and lifeless experience tempting us to turn off the machine and go to bed. Fortunately, sometimes we've sat down to play a game without expecting much — it's shareware or a rental — and suddenly found ourselves caught up in a whirlwind of excitement in which every turn leads to some new sign of life. These games manage to give even the most seasoned players a thrill comparable to that felt the first time they



played a game when everything was new and exciting.

Several things translate into energy on a TV or computer screen. Movement is a key element to creating a lively atmosphere. The simple choice to include waving flags in the background of *Vectorman* gave the very first level of the game a heightened sense of excitement. A game that uses this technique is more likely to get the player charged up and excited about what's to come.

marching into battle or getting ready to dive out of an airplane.

Probably the most exciting and challenging method of introducing energy into a game, however, is from fine-tuning the AI to the point that players begin to feel that the game is truly reacting to what they are doing. When the AI is convincing enough to give a game a feeling of reality, the player feeds off this energy. Only living things react in this kind of intelligent manner, and there is no greater thrill than when a game seems to have actually developed its own sense of power. Beating the game suddenly becomes much more than an intellectual challenge — it becomes an emotional necessity.

I think one of the most important things that could happen to game design is a crossover of underground design into the mainstream.

— Kerry J. Gansofsky, CDO/Founder, High Voltage Software, Inc. (NBA Hangtime, Tempest X3)

Music can also be used to raise the energy level in a game and is probably one of the most under-utilized methods. While a lifeless soundtrack can get by as nothing more than background atmosphere, used correctly, music can inject a whole new sense of energy into a project. Even in the most tedious of set-up screens, a motivating soundtrack can make players feel like they are

As with most elements of good design, a game with these qualities is useless if the designers can't find a way to let players tap into it. A well-designed game will invite players to celebrate the game's energy — and even give them the opportunity to increase it as their skill levels increase. In doing so, the game enables players to become part of a more organic and thoroughly satisfying experience.

ng



The dramatic music in the *Panzer Dragoon* series sets the tone for a very exciting battle in the sky before the battle starts



Energy need not come from an explosive action scene, it can just as easily come from a well-designed puzzle-solving episode

Why It All Matters

We certainly hope that this article provides some food for thought for developers. But how does all this help the gamer? After all, liking or disliking a videogame often comes down to a matter of personal taste (the I-don't-know-anything-about-art-but-I-know-what-I-like school of thought). In the end, understanding the finer points of what makes a good game invites a deeper appreciation for games in general. Michelangelo's sculptures can be appreciated without knowing anything about the complex muscle structure of the human body, but the appreciation is much deeper when the viewer understands exactly what kind of effort went into delivering such a deep and careful expression of the human form.

The elements highlighted in this feature are not new. In fact, each one is just a part of why we all love videogames so much in the first place, but by identifying them in this way, it makes it

easier to demand them in games — both on the consumer side ("this game has no energy, I won't be buying the sequel") and on the developer side ("OK, Suit. I can ship this game now, but without the additional playtesting to balance it, expect horrendous reviews and sales").

And so, as we look to the future and ask ourselves what videogames will deliver next, we can examine what we already know and demand that future games go beyond by introducing new and exciting elements into the mix. What if, for example, tomorrow's games not only gave us balance, creativity, focus, character, tension and energy but also went on to explore emotion, intellectual fulfillment, and artistic inspiration. The point is, we know what it takes to make a good game and if we can count on all these elements in every game, then we can get back to what's most exciting about videogames — dreaming up what's next.

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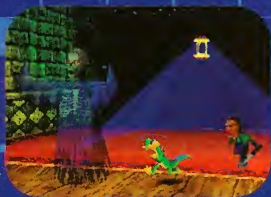
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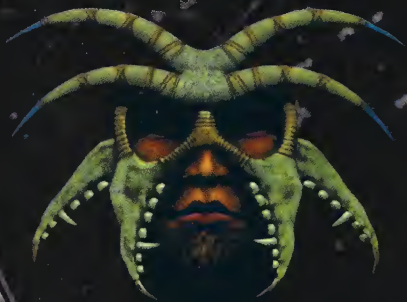
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Actual screen shot from Microsoft Flight Simulator 6.0



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alpha s

All the previews, half the fat

It's worth asking whether the PlayStation, after two years on the shelf, has any new tricks left. Sony's answer: *Blasto*. Our exclusive first look begins on page 56, but that's just the first of the info-packed exclusives we've crammed in this month. Bon appétit.

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Blasto

A 3D rendered character named Blasto stands in a desert-like environment. He is a muscular figure with a red, inflated upper body and blue pants. He wears a blue mask with a yellow flame on top and a yellow 'B' on his chest. He holds a glowing blue energy sphere in his right hand, from which a beam of light emanates. The background features a large, cratered yellow moon in a teal sky, a purple tree on the left, and purple rock formations on the right.


Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **SCEA**

Developer: **Sony Interactive Studios America**

Release Date: **Fall 1997**

Origin: **U.S.**



The initial effort from SISA's Foster City studios, Sony hopes *Blasto* will be both a good game and an impressive demonstration of what PlayStation can do

One of the biggest criticisms leveled at PlayStation before and after its launch was that its hefty graphics libraries and OS meant that there was little room for developers to explore the system. It was said that PlayStation, despite the good looks of *Ridge Racer* and *Tri-Spinners*, just wasn't as powerful as it seemed. "There's been a lot of unfair criticism of PlayStation, and we wanted to prove that all wrong," says producer John Beard, discussing the genesis of the title.

So the game the team has produced will not only dramatically up the ante for PlayStation technology, but should also firmly establish SISA's reputation beyond the realm of sports titles. Any one of *Blasto*'s technological achievements would

be impressive alone, but in combination they provide for a game that is clearly well beyond anything currently available for the system.

The game is full 3D, over-the-shoulder, similar to *Mario* or *Tomb Raider*. "We knew we had the engine," says Beard, "but we thought, are we gonna do what everyone else does? 'OK, it's a dark future, go blow everything up!' Or do we do something that has more personality and depth?" The team decided to go with a game based on a parody superhero character, Captain Blasto. "He's a combination of James Bond, Inspector Clouseau, and Flash Gordon," says Beard. In the game, Blasto must save his planet, Zantax, by finally vanquishing his arch-nemesis, Bosc.

ng alphas



The blue chicken (below, left) gives players a higher jump. Keeping with the humor theme, it's named Kay F. See (get it?)



Though the character certainly has precedent in the videogame world (*Captain Quazar*, for one), the setting of the game, which draws heavily on the Chuck Jones Warner Brothers style, is fairly unique in a 3D videogame (although it was used to some extent in *Bubsy 3D*). As the look of the character and landscape lead you to expect, the game has a humorous tone to it. "We didn't want to bat the player over the head with it," says Beard, "but it is there—for instance one of the idle animations is *Blasto* pulling his spandex superhero pants out of his butt." *Blasto* also makes heroic comments throughout the game, of the "Take that, Evildeer!" variety, although (thankfully) they can be toned down or turned off. Still, considering the voice-overs will be done by Phil ("Saturday Night Live") Hartman (who is also the voice for Troy McClure of "The Simpsons"), you may not want to.

The game itself is massive—roughly four square miles of explorable area with eight distinct environments. This is quite a lot when you're on foot, with people—or pear-shaped alien soldiers—constantly

shooting at you. Unlike *Tomb Raider*, the game streams constantly off CD. "We wanted to prove it could be done—a huge 3D game with no loading time," says Beard. Although there are some non-interactive sequences of in-game animation, there are no FMV cut scenes. The distinctions between environments flow gradually—as you leave the desert, you may start to see vegetation that gets thicker and thicker until you realize you're in the jungle environment.

Blasto has huge environments (an average of 70 to 80,000 polygons per environment, with the largest having over 150,000) and tons of animation—three full-time traditional animators worked on the project. Most of the 30+ characters in the game have around 500 frames of animation, and Captain *Blasto* himself has more than 2,000, with specialized animations (like swimming or flying) loaded and purged in the background, as needed. Because the environment streams off disc, using Redbook audio was impossible. The MIDI music system, though, is fully interactive and changes tone and pace as *Blasto* gets in more or less precarious situations.

The gameplay itself should be familiar to most players—this is a platform-shooter—but as long as it's done well, this isn't necessarily a bad thing. *Blasto* has the expected moves: jump, a *Tomb Raider*-style "walk," a flip, side-steps, and so on. There's even a Yoshi-style blue chicken to ride on. There will be at least 10 weapons, a jet-pack, and more. Enemy AI is fairly advanced. The standard enemy, the "peartrorp," will not notice you until it sees you—unless it hears you kill another peartrorp. Enemies also signal to each other, and have variable degrees of courage. Shoot at one and it may stay to fight while another may run away.

We are also assured that "tons" of



These original design sketches are by lead artist Ben Harrison



Although there's plenty of shooting (above), there is also exploration (top)

hidden stuff is in the game, from secret areas, to Easter-egg animations. "Say you randomly don't kill someone," says Beard. "He may walk around a corner, and if you follow him, he may go into a secret door or possibly get in a ship and fly away in an animation you haven't seen before."

One of the dangers in creating a game with a massive 3D world is that players will become lost, stuck, or bored (this was a downfall of *Bubsy 3D*, and even happened occasionally in *Tomb Raider*). Although the proof is in the playing, the designers have taken steps to ensure this won't happen. "We've set up the hierarchy of gameplay so there's primary, secondary, and tertiary goals," says Beard. "In the first five minutes we want someone to be able to pick it up and get instant gratification running around and taking stuff out, so you've got the quick initial fun right at the start. Second, you've got environmental hazards and small puzzles — how to get somewhere, and so on. As your tertiary task, you've got larger goals. But we've been very careful how we've designed the maps, so there's not really a situation where your walking around bored — there's always something to do."

More than just a game, though, *Blasto* should stand as an impressive PlayStation technology demonstration. "Everyone says PlayStation can't do certain things," says Dillon Cuthbert, lead programmer. "And we're basically saying: Yes, it can." Most groundbreaking may be the software z-buffering, which enables smooth transitions as Captain Blasto moves in and out of water or mud. "Z-buffering is fairly standard technology,"

says Cuthbert. "But no one's done it on PlayStation yet. It was pretty difficult to implement initially, because we were battling against a wall of people saying, 'It can't be done,' but we thought about it a bit and did it." (*Crash 2* is also rumored to use software z-buffering.)

The use of environment mapping is another PlayStation first. "The reason we did this," says Beard, "is because people said you could never do environment mapping on PlayStation. We got talking to the programmers and that said, 'That's bullshit! — we can do that,' so we did." In the game, Blasto's pants and cowl are both environment mapped, and at one point in the game, there will be a fully reflective "chrome Blasto."

Thanks to low-level programming (the game uses none of PlayStation's graphics libraries), the game also achieves a high polygon per second count at 512-by-240 resolution. The game uses PlayStation's ability to do semi-transparent polygons to increase the apparent polygon count — like stained glass windows with lead between the panes, done with a single polygon. "No one's used this yet, because there isn't a tool for it," says Cuthbert. "Photoshop doesn't let you draw like that,



The Marvin the Martian influence is especially evident on the space port above the planet of Zantax 5



ng alphas

but we developed a way of doing it."

The number of custom tools developed for the project is impressive. The team brings level models and characters in directly from Alias running on an SGI. "It allows us to take everything the artists have and put it onscreen, displayed as the artists originally intended, without any programming limitations," says Cuthbert. "It gives us enormous flexibility in creating just a huge, seamless 3D world. There's nothing rigid or hardwired in there at all." The engine was designed to be extremely flexible and modifiable—testers and designers can alter things such as the view cone very easily. "The flexibility frees us up to what we do best, not just constantly implementing changes for the designers."

One tool lets the designers see exactly which parts of the world are most heavily trafficked by testers—then they can either tweak the design to direct players to important parts of the map, or, if



The lighting effects from Blastoff's blaster are nothing short of amazing—and come in handy on a later level that is almost totally dark

an area is simply not visited enough, they can move important elements from that area to a more heavily trafficked spot.

The team denies that their status as a first-party developer gave them any special access to the latest from the labs in Japan, but Cuthbert acknowledges a personal relationship he formed with someone at SCEI helped. "I went to Japan and showed someone some of our technology, and he was impressed enough to keep the contact open. It was just lucky, really. I don't think anyone else here has the same kind of link. It helped that I speak Japanese," he adds. "And we gave him ideas as well."

Case in point: the skinned joint system. All the characters in the game



have skinned joints, so there are no seams in any of the characters. "After seeing that, the library people in Japan developed their own skinned joint system, and it's actually in the current revision of the libraries," says Cuthbert. "But it's only just come out, so we'll be the first to market with it."

The game boasts a complete particle system, and shows off a number of custom routines, like rippling lava. "We discovered a lot of interesting secrets. There's just so much you can do with the PlayStation graphics chip. It's extremely powerful and no one's really utilized it yet."

Also exciting is the use of vertex lighting to prelight the environments. "We really didn't want to over-texture map the floors, because games look crappy when you put textures on the floors," says Beard. "They bit out." Instead, using vertex lighting (lighting each vertex of a polygon individually, instead of merely lighting the entire polygon at once), a one-color floor, like sand in the desert environment, develops a number of hues and colors, while still looking sharp.

Vertex lighting is an extremely time-consuming process for the artists, and it's a telling sign of the importance of this project to Sony that the Blastoff team has been given carte blanche to take artists from other teams to complete the project on time. "We've got priority right now," says Beard. "I've never seen a situation where they said, 'Pull whatever kind of talent you need.' It's really great."

Sony has a lot to prove with Blastoff. First, it wants to finally dispel the notion that it lacks a strong first-party development presence. But perhaps more importantly, as PlayStation enters mid-life, Sony is eager to change the reputation of the system. When the system first launched, Sony built developer support by promoting the notion that it was easy to develop for, that nearly anyone who knew how to write "Hello, world" in C could produce a game. Now Sony seems equally eager to make sure people understand that the system that promises any programmer good results, can deliver, to great programmers, fantastic results. Blastoff should be proof of that.

ng



Most areas have vista points from which the lay of the environment can be seen (top)



More design sketches by Harrison show off the flora of Zantax 5

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World Championship Racing



While M2 may be the industry's biggest question mark, it is clear that games designed for it may live up to the hype



World Championship Racing is intended to be as much a demo of M2 features as it is a game. Note the specular highlights and alpha channel smoke

As Next Generation goes to press on the brink of E3, Matsushita's plans for the M2 console are still the game industry's biggest mystery. However, while details of the system (and final tech specs) may still be a closely guarded secret, news on

Format:	M2
Publisher:	Studio 3DO
Developer:	Studio 3DO
Release Date:	Fall 1997
Origin:	U.S.

"In this game there is no pop-in — none at all"

Ed Rotberg, Lead Designer

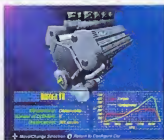
individual titles is leaking like water through a sieve.

World Championship Racing began development almost three years ago, before the designers even had hardware to work with. "The first six months on a new format are always interesting," says Greg Richardson, producer, "because you're giving as much feedback to the guys who are building the hardware as you are actually developing the game. We knew that going in, and so this has really been a guinea pig project to help define

and make the tools more robust for other M2 projects."

Lead designer Ed Rotberg, industry veteran of *Battlezone* fame, puts it this way: "We've been down a few false paths, but because of that we've been on the leading edge as far as development. Maybe that's braggadocio, but I believe we are. Obviously there's never enough time or resources to do things exactly the way you want to, but I'm very pleased with this game. I don't think there's ever been anything out there, ever, that looks anything like this."

And he's right. WCR runs at 30fps at a full 640-by-480, twice the resolution of standard console games — PlayStation



Players can assemble custom cars from specialized parts



titles like *Tobal No. 1* run that sharp, but *Tobal* uses no textures. *WCR* is fully texture-mapped and is based on the Professional SportsCar Racing circuit (formerly the IMSA); it's set on courses all over the world. "One of the reasons we chose that license is they're a fast growing circuit," Richardson explains. "But, more importantly, we think their cars are far and away the most beautiful, and the tracks they use, like Laguna and Now Orleans, are just world class venues. It really gave us a lot of creativity."

The tracks were each modeled down to every last curve and tree on the sidelines. The landscape model for each is constant, but the designers have used no replacement geometry for the tracks (as can be seen in *Pilotwings 64*, for example). "In this game there's no pop-in — none at all," Rotberg boasts with obvious pride. "One of the things you'll notice is that our tires are round. I mean they are *round*! We don't screw around with any of this other stuff. They are round!"

Players will be able to choose from "standard" cars but can also assemble custom cars from a selection of body styles, engines, tires, and so on. The game can be played with a more or less demanding physical model, in either arcade or sim mode. The sim model is highly accurate, reflecting not only speed and momentum, but even a separate variable for each tire's suspension. "You won't have to worry about things like tire temperature and wear in arcade mode," Rotberg explains. "But in sim mode when you start out on the track, your tires are cold and you won't have the same traction you will have as you race. So we



When cars swerve, they leave tire marks, and the marks remain on the track for the entire duration of the race

put some gauges on the dashboard showing tire temperature and tire wear."

The game's bells and whistles include real-time specular highlights, alpha channel smoke, and variable fog. The latter was a near accident, initially added to the New Orleans stage to hide pop-in. Once the engine had been tweaked and the software libraries were optimized, the fog was no longer needed,

"The tracks are world class. It allowed us a lot of creativity"

Greg Richardson, Producer

but it looked so good the designers left it in as an optional weather condition.

Every new system seems to need at least one racing game to show off the hardware. *World Championship Racing* fills that niche, but could also offer a few surprises. "Let's put it this way," Rotberg concludes. "There's tracks other than those listed, and there are also some other interesting, um, Easter Eggs, that don't have much to do with racing. But because we were doing a lot of work with this hardware, there were some other things we could do, so we found ways to fit them in." Let's hope Matushita does the same with the system as a whole.

ng



The game's physical model seems to be the most accurate ever available on a console



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Out of the Void



The staff at GameFX are big fans of sci-fi films. *Out of the Void* reflects their enthusiasm with brilliantly illuminated space scene environments

Harnessing the power of 3Dfx, GameFX rides home the chip's first native game

Format: **PC CD-ROM**

Publisher: **TBA**

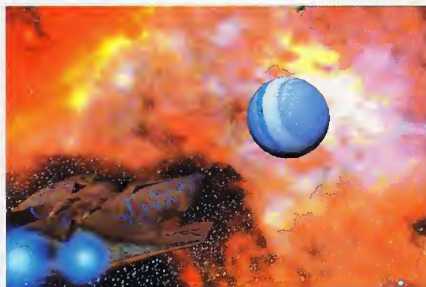
Developer: **GameFX**

Release Date: **TBA**

Origin: **U.S.**

Like cellular fission, many game companies are being born out of a split. Such was the birth of GameFX (now nine months old) when Noah Davis led a group of fellow Looking Glass employees down the road to a new Arlington, Massachusetts office. Davis, president and CEO of GameFX and LG's former director of technology, describes the move as a forward-thinking one.

"GameFX is dedicated to putting high technology back into gaming," an even-



toned spacecrafts with notably smooth edges and complex textures featuring more detail than anything in the current market. Also immediately evident are the extraordinary lighting effects, comparable to special effects found in movies.

Breakthrough graphics, however, don't usually come on mass-market machines. This is why, currently, *Out of the Void* only runs on a P200 and requires 3Dfx acceleration. "If a common machine is a P60, P90 or P120," Davis languidly says, "that's too low for us right now." While readily accepting that the mass audience isn't there for him yet, Davis believes that if GameFX builds it, they will come.

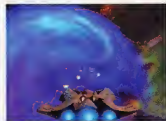
To do this, Davis has established strong ties with 3Dfx and Intel. Both companies need developers like GameFX, who can create showpieces for their hardware, as 3Dfx president Greg Ballard concedes. "3Dfx really thinks of itself as a platform, not as a chip company," Ballard says. "They hired me away from Capcom as a way of making a connection to the

"GameFX is dedicated to putting high technology back into gaming"

Noah Davis, President

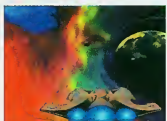
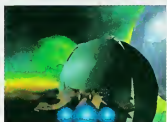
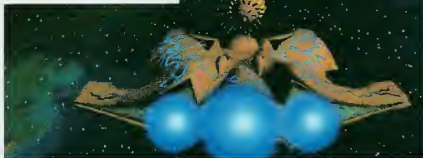
toned Davis says. "We aggressively go after cutting-edge technologies, not necessarily reinventing but adapting them, and put them inside of gaming components as quickly as possible."

Given the look of its first title, *Out of the Void*, GameFX is managing to do just that. This 3D space shooter's gameplay is still early, and Davis insists the design will be kept arcade-simple. But what a beautiful shooter — unlike any game before it, *Out of the Void* looks like CG animation, but it's the real deal. The fully 3D environment features polygon-



The OOTV engine pushes around tens of thousands of polygons

ng alphas



Like a meter, the color of the ship's veins reflect damage levels



game business. The theory being that we need to have a direct link to game content as a way of really exploiting the power of this technology."

And the competition in the accelerator race is already heating up. "This title has been developed on a board released last November," says 3Dfx V.P. of marketing Andy Keane. "You're not on a six-month treadmill with our chip. *Out of the Void* is evidence. This chip will still have distinct value into the following year."

Fortunately for the suits, Davis is also very much behind the development philosophy at 3Dfx technology. "We're of like minds," he says. "They want to do stuff that no one understands how to deal with quite yet, and that's exactly what our goal is."

Interestingly enough, Davis sees *Out of the Void* as an episodic game,

with new gaming updates available every couple of months, which may be why they haven't pinned down the number of levels yet.

"Basically, GameFX is a big experiment," Davis says. "We have different methodologies for games and their storylines." Davis explains that a comic book will ship with the game, providing players with a backstory for the action. At press time, GameFX was negotiating who would actually publish this and future titles. "With this type of space action game there are a number of licenses begging to be done like that," Davis says. But due to the limited

"GameFX is a big experiment, we have different methodologies"

Noah Davis, President

number of gamers who will be able to run *Out of the Void*, he's not positively sure it will be available through the retail channel.

Davis mentions how particularly proud he is of his team and what they've accomplished in the face of companies who have been slow to accept new technology. "The thing is," Davis says, "there's such a gap between what current games give people and what's available given the current processors and 3D accelerators. It's gonna take a year for people to catch up."

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With true space physics, *OOTV* doesn't permit traditional tricks, like fogging distant objects. GameFX had to create a realistic spatial partitioning system. In a field of 1,000 polygonal asteroids (above) the game still runs at 30+ fps

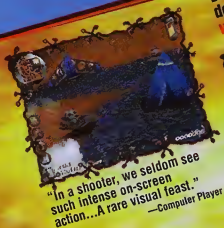


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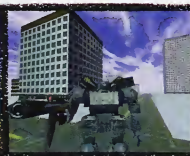
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Nuclear Strike



This time, the setting is a very M*A*S*H-like Asia (above). The HUD displays everything the pilot needs to know at all times (right)

Game companies have always adhered to the if-it-ain't-broke-don't-fix-it approach. Successful formulas are safe. Successful formulas sell games (just ask Capcom).

Occasionally, though, a developer follows an established formula and creates a product that is new in all the right places.

Nuclear Strike picks up where the top ten-selling *Soviet Strike* (NG 20) left off, with the team's next mission. Michael Kosaka, *Nuclear*'s enthusiastic producer, explains, "The general storyline has a madman with a nuke running loose, and the Strike's got to track him down."

"We've got a harrier, an A-10, tanks — a little bit of everything"

Michael Kosaka, Producer

Electronic Arts is recycling the *Soviet* engine, with a few improvements. "As far as gameplay goes," says Kosaka, "we're coming back with a bunch of new features, and this time the engine's going to be faster and smoother. We've got a better frame rate going on." The Heads-Up Display now provides more information, and the compass now

Call it a top-down twitch game. Call it the thinking man's shooter. But, please, just don't call it *Soviet Strike II*

Format:	PlayStation, PC CD-ROM
Publisher:	Electronic Arts
Developer:	Electronic Arts
Release Date:	September (PS-X), October (PC)
Origin:	U.S.



points the player toward his or her next mission. Also, the loading time of the photo-realistic terrain has been optimized. Terrain streams off the disc, so there is no perceptible loading time.

The ability to pilot additional vehicles is the most interesting new feature.

"We're going to have a lot more vehicles," Kosaka explains. "So it's not just the Apache. It'll be a whole variety of choppers, actually. We're probably going to have on the order of five different helicopters to fly, plus we've got a harrier, an A-10, tanks — a little bit of everything." In addition, EA will expand on a feature found in *Soviet Strike*. In *Soviet*'s level three, players control a group of troops *Command & Conquer* style; this will happen in at least one of *Nuclear*'s levels.

Nuclear also features a persistent environment. When a player shoots a spread of missiles into the ground, the resulting crater remains for the duration of the level. Weapons include the



Strike fans should be pleased with the variety of enemies



Destroy the mountains and hills (left, right) and they'll stay destroyed

standard guns and missiles, along with new additions such as infrared tracking weapons and flame-throwers. The vehicles and weapons look very realistic; early polygonal models show an attention to detail worthy of the company that produces the *Jane's* series.

The music in *Nuclear* will be context-sensitive. Kosaka describes it as "a proprietary system we call IMS (Interactive Music System) that's based on what's happening in the game. So if you're getting shot, if you're dying, then the music will be very pulse-pounding, if you're off in the boonies, it will be softer."

The *Strike* series has historically been difficult, almost to a fault. To this end, EA tells us that *Nuclear* will be a bit easier than *Soviet*. "But we're not going to rely on just giving you more bullets," Kosaka says, "because that's sort of a cheap way to do it. We're instead going to concentrate on what information

we're giving the players, how we are getting it to them, and so on."

The designers hope that giving more direction and assistance to the player will attract new fans, while hard-core *Strike* devotees will still find the game challenging. No one does top-down helicopter shooters like Electronic Arts

"If you're getting shot, if you're dying, then the music will be very pulse-pounding."

Michael Kosaka

(although, admittedly, no one else does top-down helicopter shooters at all), and *Nuclear* may set a new high watermark in the *Strike* series.

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Note: Look on the Next Generation Disc for exclusive monthly updates on *Nuclear Strike's* development.



Environments in *Nuclear Strike* are quite varied (left). Graphics are detailed, from the new Harrier (below right) to the realistic explosions (above right)

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Armored Core

From Soft, with a little help from Sony in Japan, looks set to deliver one of the most impressive mech games ever built



In-mission cut scenes are handled with non-interactive sequences (above). The environmental lighting effects are stunning (left)

Platform manufacturers giving financial help to smaller developers to encourage development for a system is nothing new (Hasbro distributed scores of free SGI workstations to spark development for its ill-fated VR project), but it's rare to find that level of commitment in a company once it has the dominant platform, as Sony does in Japan.

Still, that's exactly what SCE's third-party division has been doing in Japan —

Well over 200,000 different core combinations are possible

enabling smaller developers to stop worrying about market pressures and concentrate on developing great games. *Armored Core* will be one of the first titles to ship under the program.

It's another entry in the giant fighting mechs genre, and the game's attention to detail, both in design and execution, marks it as one of the most impressive titles to come for PlayStation so far this year.

In the game, you play a mercenary

Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	SCEA
Developer:	From Soft
Release Date:	August 1997
Origin:	Japan

with access to a top-rate mech garage. (To avoid the lawsuit by FASA, the game calls mechs "armored cores," the core being the chest section that one commands the mechs from.) In the garage, one's core is constructed. (The robot designer is Shoji Kawamori, of *Robotech* fame.) Every aspect of the core is customizable — from arms to legs to chest, right-hand weapon, left-hand weapon, secondary weapons, and so on. Well over 200,000 different core combinations are possible.

Once you've created your core, you can completely customize the color (using RGB sliders) and pattern down to the individual component. You can even create your own logo. Then, you name your core and select your mission.

Each of the 30 levels in the game



The satisfaction of launching a missile or six is hard to beat



The customization options are the deepest yet seen for mechs on any platform

has between one and six possible missions. Depending on which mission you choose, the missions available to you on the next level may change. Failing in a mission will bring up a different selection of missions for the next level than if you succeeded, for instance, so it's possible to play the game multiple times without accepting the same mission twice.

The interface for core selection and customization and mission selection is one of the most intuitive and eloquent

Next Generation has seen and is typical of the attention to detail that characterizes the project.

Once you select a mission (after seeing a mission briefing, you can reconfigure your core, if you choose), a drop ship brings your core into the action in a non-interactive sequence — just one of several similar touches that add to the immersion level of the game.

Gameplay is fast and high-res. The control is fairly complex — every button of the controller is utilized — but the learning curve is easy. The in-mission graphics are amazing, making full effect of the latest PlayStation graphics libraries — lightsourcing is evident in explosions, animation speed is a consistent 30 fps, and the game's graphics have a solid feel that was simply not present in first- and second-generation PlayStation software.

Missions have an overall goal (protect a train, maybe) and boss, but also feature plenty of fast core-to-core arcade combat

and take between three and 30 minutes to complete, depending on the level. The missions **Next Generation** played at From Soft's offices in Tokyo had excellent design — always tension-filled, but rarely out-of-control. The feeling we got when playing is best described as a cross between *Robotron*, *WarHawk*, and *Mech Warrior II*.

Completing a mission successfully earns money for core upgrades and reveals the good or evil intentions of the person who put out the contract.

From spent over a year developing the engine alone — it shows

Eventually, players can determine whether a mission is for good or evil and make moral choices for themselves.

The two-player mode (either split-screen or via link cable) is well balanced and fun, and souped up cores that one earns in campaign mode can be used in versus mode as well.

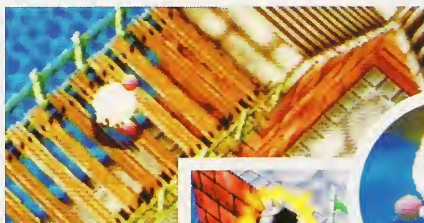
From Soft, with Sony's support, spent well over a year in development of the engine alone — it shows. Quality is high, even at alpha. SCEI's practice of supporting promising, but small, third parties is a win-win situation for everyone. Gamers get an excellent game, From Soft stands to make plenty of money, and Sony gets another quality addition to its library. It would be a good thing if SCEA considers importing the strategy, as well as the game it helped to create.

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The explosions in *Armored Core* are really rather impressive — and check out the movie on the disc to see how smooth the animation is

Bomberman 64



Bomberman's bombs appear as if they might grow or shrink, and with the addition of Mario-like puzzles, the one-player mode seems to have improved ten-fold



The famous Japanese icon forges ahead into the 64-bit future — hopefully carrying all of its 16-bit magic along with it

Large-scale textures and grandiose environments create new atmosphere for an old series. Our hero appears even smaller than ever

Shortly after the Bomberman franchise reached the peak of cultural status in Japan, Hudson Japan neatly retooled its entire software development team toward making 3D games. The company, now in preparation with about five Nintendo 64 titles and a

Hudson's initial designs for Bomberman 64 were scrapped after about six months of work

few PlayStation games, is entering the next generation head first, with Bomberman carrying (glove in hand) the Hudson banner.

But it hasn't been easy for Hudson. Initial designs for Bomberman 64 were scrapped after about six months of work, and the team, seeing even newer 3D games arrive (not to mention Interplay's PC version), started up again with renewed verve and determination. Bomberman 64 is aiming to keep the multiplayer tension of its 16-bit days on Super NES and to boost the first-person play. (After all, it was the multiplayer mode that made the game a classic.)

Early shots of the game display Hudson's smooth transition to 3D with cartoonish but impressive 3D backgrounds and a hint of action-based exploration, similar to that of Super Mario

64. In single-player mode, the Bomberman character must be far more adventurous and seek out secret tunnels and passageways in the 3D arenas to get through to the next level. More belligerent enemies confront players here than in previous incarnations. Gamers will play this mode via an isometric perspective.

Little word is out on the multiplayer mode, although it's a sure bet to be included. But what really could make it any better? Speedier characters, N64's graphic enhancements (like gorgeous transparency capabilities and anti-aliasing), and new weapons are in the wings. Hudson has hinted at the creation of an N64 multiap (for as many as eight people) as well, so it's highly likely that the Bomberman fests of old are soon to be back in vogue.

After Super Bomberman for the Super NES, Hudson had really reached its zenith in the 16-bit arena; all later versions pale in comparison. Let's hope the 64-bit version brings the magic back, proving Super Bomberman 2 wasn't just a stroke of luck.



First-player mode looks great, but Hudson is hush about multiplayer



Hopefully, this won't take after Doraemon, a bad Mario clone

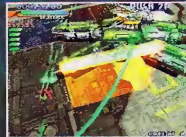
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Sonic Jam



True to the style of the *Sonic* series, the 3D level in *Sonic Jam* delivers all the attitude and speed of the original

After the cancellation of last year's *Sonic X-Treme* and the subsequent release of the disappointing *Sonic 3D Blast*, Sega fans have had good reason to be concerned over where the *Sonic* series is heading.

The recently revealed *Sonic Jam*, however, could be enough of a reason to get excited about Sega's once-proud mascot all over again. Back in the hands of the Japanese-based *Sonic Team* (including *Sonic* and *Nights* creator Yuji

If the 3D level is any indication, a new triple-A game could be heading to Saturn

Naka and Naoto Ohshima), *Sonic Jam* is a collection of 16-bit *Sonic* games tied together by an impressive, real-time 3D level designed in the vein of *Mario 64*.

Sega admits that it is working on a full game based on the same engine, which makes this new level particularly exciting. The new game is scheduled to be out by the end of the year, and if the 3D level in *Sonic Jam* is any indication of the ambition level going into the title, a new triple-A (non-arcade) game could be heading to Saturn.

Beyond the 16-bit titles included

Is this a sign of exciting new things for Sonic or just a fancy new package for some great old games?



Format:	Saturn
Publisher:	Sega
Developer:	Sega
Release Date:	August
Origin:	Japan

in *Sonic Jam* (*Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Sonic 2*, *Sonic 3*, and *Sonic & Knuckles*), the game offers a gallery of rendered art as well as information about the Sonic "goods" strewn about the 3D landscape. The original *Sonic* games also benefit from a retrofitted analog control option. Although the digital direction pad still works fine, there is a decided advantage in accuracy using the analog pad.

Other bonus items include a few minor upgrades made to the 16-bit games, such as the ability to save at any point and Spin Dash in the original *Sonic The Hedgehog*. *Sonic Jam* will likely be a pleasant walk down memory lane for die-hard fans of the series, but still doesn't quite qualify as a new game. The 3D level is an exciting indicator of what's to come, but on its own does not justify the purchase.

Described as step one in Sega's "Project Sonic," *Sonic Jam* is at the very least a clear indicator that Sega is not willing to let the once-revolutionary series fade away through neglect.



From the original 16-bit adventures to real-time 3D playgrounds, *Sonic Jam* gives fans a little bit of everything

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ng alphas



G-Police



Each craft leaves its own thruster trail, and every weapon is accompanied by a different blast effect



The flight-based shoot 'em up should blast other end-of-year releases off the planet

Psygnosis president Ian Heatherington has predicted G-Police will top the charts for Christmas 1997. Instead of being horrified at the pressure placed on them, the team responsible for the game has similar sentiments: "The game is excellent," says head producer Graham Davis. "Ian knows this. Otherwise he wouldn't have said it."

From the recent evidence **Next Generation** procured, this confidence

"We've gone for the *Blade Runner* look, simply because it was the vision of the future city"

Ross Thody, Producer

isn't misplaced. The game is set in 2097, in domed cities located on one of Jupiter's moons. As part of the local G-Police, players pilot high-tech, heavily armed helicopters. Throughout 35 missions, they must protect innocent civilians from two warring corporations.

According to the team, the missions will be more complex than the cliché "destroy the enemy vehicles then return to base." For example, it's possible to call in ground teams to assist the player and scan vehicles to locate enemy weapons.

Format:	PC/PlayStation
Publisher:	Psygnosis
Developer:	Psygnosis
Release Date:	December 1997
Origin:	U.K.

When the game begins, it's easy to see its inspiration. G-Police producer, Ross Thody, admits: "We've gone for the *Blade Runner* look, simply because it was the vision of the future city: dark, moody, and lots of neon."

Huge skyscrapers with hundreds of flickering lights loom out of the darkness in front of the cockpit display, various futuristic motor vehicles zoom by on the streets below, and flight craft cruise by. Many of the 50 domes do stray from this future city recipe. Industrial, mining, skyscraper, solar panel, and agricultural domes are all included to add diversity to the game's scenery.

With a powerful 3D engine, G-Police places the action among the buildings and structures, rather than above them. Davis notes it hasn't been easy. "To create a 3D city," he says, "in which the



Sketches show how the futuristic look of 2097 was built



The lighting effects in *G-Police* are a particular strong point. Skyscrapers loom in the darkness and thruster craft infest the polluted skies

With a powerful 3D engine, *G-Police* places the action among the buildings and structures, rather than above them

player has a full 3D ability to fly around, is an epic task. If you can go anywhere, you need tons of 3D art for buildings, cars, planes — especially if you want to give the player lots of environments."

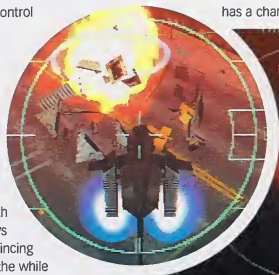
Piloting the Havoc craft (a kind of sci-fi helicopter/thrust vehicle) is an impressively realistic experience and the view rarely shudders as the many tower blocks are cruised by. The handling is tricky at first, as most of the PlayStation pad's buttons are used and there are two control modes to learn — normal and hover. Once this has been mastered, players can conduct intricate dogfights with several other craft, swoop between buildings, and zoom precariously beneath pedestrian walkways — with a truly convincing feeling of flight. All the while the engine maintains a steady 30fps update, so the fluidity of the flight experience is never lost.

Some missions involve taking out huge *Gundam*-style robots and various

other terrain crawlers. For this, the player is equipped with a fantastically effective 1,000-pound bomb. When detonated, it sends out a huge shockwave, blowing other vehicles into the air, à la *Independence Day*.

G-Police is in place to be yet another huge Psygnosis release, unique both in its use of detailed, totally explorable landscapes and its combination of flight sim handling with shoot-'em-up gameplay. Number one at Christmas? It certainly has a chance.

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Available weapons include hyper-velocity missiles, starburst dispersion missiles, and plasma launchers. Here, a Henschel AAG-53E 25mm cannon

Youngblood



For those unfamiliar with the comic, Team Youngblood is a group of futuristic heroes battling (in this case) genetic freaks

While the comic industry in general seems to be taking a hit of late (with Marvel Comics filing for bankruptcy, among other things), there are a few bright spots, and one of them is Extreme Studios. Headed by Rob Liefeld and creators of such titles as "X-Force" and "Avengeylyne,"

"The best way I can describe this is as a PlayStation *Diablo*"

Kurt Busch, Producer, GT Interactive

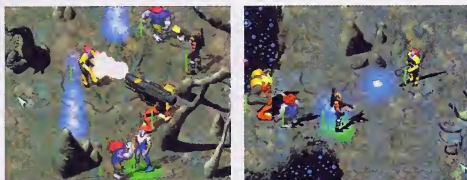
Extreme Studios had "Youngblood," one of its more popular series, recently licensed by GT Interactive.

The history of videogame adaptations of comic characters has been spotty at best and a total disaster at worst, but Kurt Busch, *Youngblood's* producer at GT, is a rabid comic fan. "The main thing is that we didn't want to make a fighting game," he insists. "*Youngblood* deserved better than that. And we didn't want another platform game. We really wanted to remain true to the characters and highlight what's unique about the comic."

For those unfamiliar with the source material, *Youngblood* is not a single character, but a team of heroes fighting evil in a future world gone politically and genetically awry. The multi-character nature of the series has dictated an

Comic books turned into videogames usually don't work, but GT Interactive and developer Realtime may have made one that does

Format:	PlayStation, PC CD-ROM
Publisher:	Realtime Associates
Developer:	GT Interactive
Release Date:	September 1997
Origin:	U.S.



The game combines elements of RPGs with real-time strategy, as players pit their team against evil forces with really, really big guns

approach that's remarkably different from comic-book adaptations of the past. "Initially," Busch explains, "I felt very strongly we should do this as a first-person RPG, take these characters and put them in your party, and if they die, they'd be dead and you'd feel terrible because you'd lost a friend and hang your head in shame. But the more we thought about it the more we realized it would be really difficult to do it as a first-person RPG because you want to show off the characters, and in first-person we couldn't work out the right set of views so players could see who was beside them. In the end, it just wasn't very satisfying."

Other approaches had their pitfalls as well. "The problem with doing a *Tomb Raider*-style, third-person game," Busch continues, "was that the main attraction of the license was not in any single character, but in the interaction of the team, and at the time trying to do it *Tomb Raider*-style with six people on a screen all running around just wasn't appetizing — the interface was just very, very difficult to design."



The sprite-based approach allows a high level of detail

In the end, Busch and the designers at Realtime decided on a sprite-based, isometric view, which enabled the characters to be rendered in great detail and gave the player a wide view of the action. And, in the final design, the action element is every bit as important as the RPG side. "I think the best way I can describe this is as a PlayStation version of *Diablo*, except you control more than one character. You have a team, and you build your team up," Busch says.

The final game will include 11 missions, and players choose teams of two to four heroes in the PlayStation version, and as many as six on the PC, although only the lead character can be controlled directly. "In that sense, the game also has some real-time strategy elements," Busch explains, "in that you can give orders to the guys on your team, tell them, 'OK, attack this target and this target,' send them off, and they'll keep doing that while you control the lead character and go off to accomplish the mission objectives — this is a very

weapon-intensive kind of combat."

The interface for both versions will be different; the PlayStation version uses the D-pad to scroll through options, while the PC version uses a *Diablo*-style series of point-and-click menus. A



Much like an RPG, the team gains experience through each mission. "It's pretty transparent to the player though," says Busch

multiplayer deathmatch will also be featured in the PC version, although otherwise the missions and design for both versions are the same.

GT Interactive, developer Realtime Associates, and comic creator Extreme Studios are all working together to make sure *Youngblood* doesn't fall into the same qualitative abyss that seems to

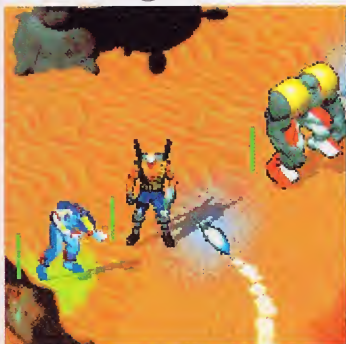
"The main attraction of the license was the interaction of the team"

Kurt Busch

befall most comic-book games. "In fact," Busch concludes, with some pride, "the story for the game was created by the developers, and Rob Liefeld at Extreme Studios liked it so much, they're incorporating it into the 'Youngblood'

series." That, we believe, is a first.

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"This is a very weapon-intensive kind of combat," says producer Kurt Busch — as if you couldn't tell that from the pictures

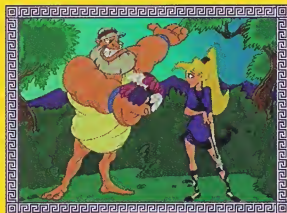
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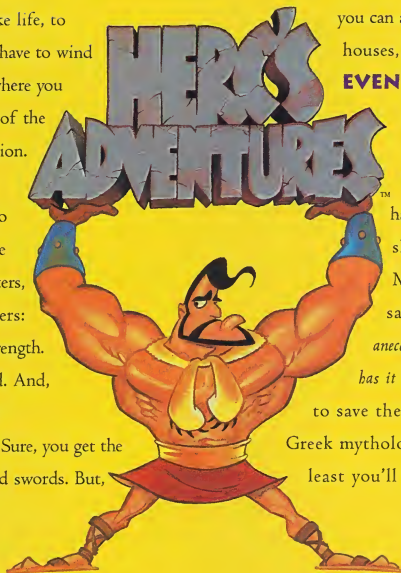
WEIRD WEAPONS. Sure, you get the usual arrows, slingshots and swords. But,

you can also arm yourself with ray guns, houses, sheep and inflatable cows.

EVEN WEIRDER BAD GUYS.

Freaky weapons are perfect for fighting even freakier enemies: The four-headed Hydra, snake-haired Medusa, sword-swinging skeletons, crazy clowns, nasty Martians and more. *GamePro* says "Challenging bosses, humorous anecdotes, and gigantic landscapes - Her's has it all." In the end, it's up to you

to save the world in this crazy twist on Greek mythology. And, if you fail? Well, at least you'll die laughing.



◀ So many Martians, so little time! And, to make matters worse, they've got Jason surrounded with ray guns.

Unfortunately for Atlanta, the Cyclops has a huge appetite for destruction. Not to mention beautiful warriors. ➡



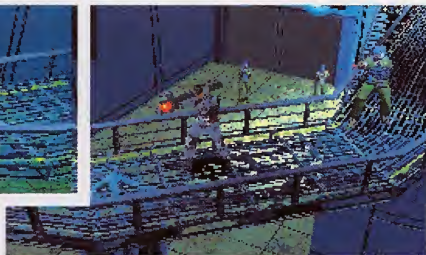
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Metal Gear Solid



Metal Gear Solid shows off just how much horsepower PlayStation has left to exploit. The structure of the original game is well-suited to 3D

A classic 8-bit game series returns and runs in 3D and with all the latest bells and whistles — sounds good, doesn't it?



The original *Metal Gear* appeared on the Z80-based MSX-2 computer in 1987, followed a year later by a sequel/update (named *Metal Gear Solid Snake* in Japan for its oddly phallic-sounding protagonist) for the 8-bit NES. The action/adventure game proved extremely popular, both in Japan and the U.S., but surprisingly no further games ever appeared.

Until now. *Metal Gear Solid* gives the original a 32-bit face/lift, updating gameplay for the 3D age while staying true to its roots. With character and game design by manga artist Hideo Kojima, the game boasts a full 3D

Konami has taken great pains to bring this fan favorite into the 90s

environment that can be viewed from either a first- or third-person perspective, and players will be able to switch views at will.

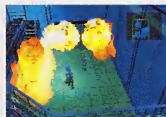
The story is set in the early 21st century in Alaska. An elite group of high-tech commandos, code-named Foxhound and led by a commander called (ahem) Liquid Snake, has taken control of a warehouse of nuclear weapons earmarked for disposal. Foxhound threatens to use the bombs on U.S. cities if the government doesn't agree to its demands. Solid Snake, an ex-member of

Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	Konami
Developer:	Konami
Release Date:	Fall 1997
Origin:	Japan

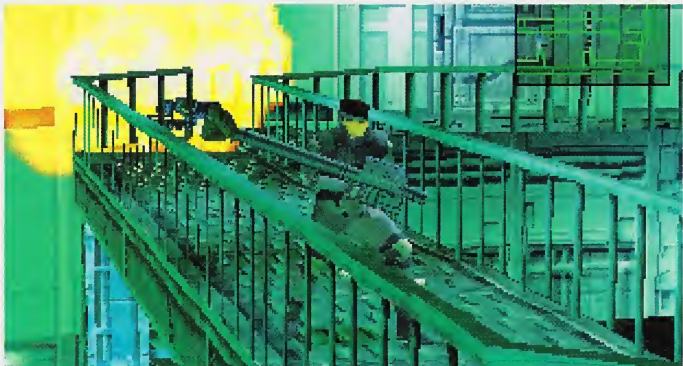
Foxhound, is given 24 hours to infiltrate the warehouse and stop the terrorists.

On the whole, *Metal Gear Solid's* choice of perspectives mirrors its pace and style, nicely representing the middle ground between *Doom's* frenetic action and *Tomb Raider's* more thoughtful platform strategy. Much like the original games in the series, players will have to spend as much time hiding from enemies as trying to shoot them. The 3D environment affords a lot of places to hide, and if any patrolling Foxhound soldiers spot the player, an alarm will sound and things will get a lot more difficult. Strangely enough, when a player is spotted, the sound effect is exactly the same as in the original 8-bit game and is accompanied by the same flashing exclamation point. Hmm.

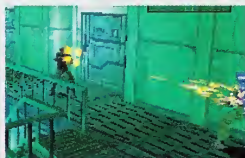
Players begin essentially unarmed, and must resort to using hand-to-hand attacks or simply avoiding the enemy altogether. The use of the third-person perspective makes seeing and avoiding enemies a bit easier, and the player's character can duck behind crates or



Some levels have enough explosions to fill a Seagal movie



Solid Snake returns, all decked out in fresh-for-the-decade polygons



Even from these still pictures, it's clear the game has plenty of action to go with its strategic elements. The panning camera adds a nice cinematic touch, and the PlayStation libraries are being mined for every special effect possible

walls and even crawl under stairways and through air ducts to avoid detection. Enemy patrols include sniffing attack dogs, and in certain areas, surveillance cameras will have to be circumvented.

Later in the game, as more and better weapons are found, such stealth becomes less of an issue, and (again, as in the original) the game slowly becomes a more straightforward action title. Various guns and arms will be available, along with grenades and "other explosive devices." The preview footage seen by *Next Generation* staff at the Tokyo Game Show certainly had its fair

share of things getting blown up real good. In addition, other items such as infrared goggles can help the player along, and information from various sources, such as wireless phones and freed prisoners, can help to avoid traps.

It's obvious that the designers at Konami have taken great pains to bring this fan favorite into the '90s without affecting the gameplay elements that made the original so beloved to many. Although numerous issues of balance and design have yet to be finalized, it seems as though Konami is off to a great start. We're looking forward to it, anyway.



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Gonna



SouthPeak



SouthPeak's technology enables video to mesh seamlessly with classic graphic adventure conventions

SouthPeak Interactive is a wholly owned, independent division of Dr. James Goodnight's SAS Institute, the largest private software company in the world (1996 revenues were over \$640 million). And they have quietly developed, over the past two years, what might be the most impressive advance in video — and adventure game — technology ever.

This is what Apple's QuickTime VR should have been

"We got started when Dr. Goodnight asked me about the Atari Jaguar," says John Toebe, VP of R&D at SouthPeak. "At that point we looked at the games out there and broke them into two categories — the click-a-button, see-a-picture, play-a-video genre, and, at the other end, what is essentially virtual reality — the *Dooms*, the *Quakes*, rendering on the fly. People are constantly looking for more realism. We felt there was an opportunity to do something between the two."

The technology they developed, Video Reality, is just that. Basically, this is what QuickTime VR should have been. In a Video Reality environment, a user can move anywhere he or she wants, just like moving through a 3D space. And at any

A \$600 million software company with no game experience decides video is the future of interactive entertainment. Scared? Don't be



time, one can look in 360 degrees. However, because the environment is video, not polygons, there is a potential for extraordinary depth of graphics. "It's like walking through one of the high-end, bit-map games," says Susan Goodnight, director of production. "A simplistic approach to this, actually *7th Guest* does this a bit," continues Toebe, "is to have a camera and you can stand in one spot and look around, then jump to another spot and the camera shows the moves



The four-sided set walls posed problems for the crew (left). Acting! (above)

ng alphas



Many of the puzzles are coded in a Visual Basic-style scripting language, which means they're fairly easy to tweak for play balancing



door numerous times, but after a given event happens in the game, the next time you pass it, a woman may walk out and say something to you — no jumps, just seamless transition. There is really no way screenshots can demonstrate just how convincing and cool this is — check out this month's Disc for a preview movie that demonstrates the Video Reality technology.

How does SouthPeak do it?
"There are some issues with trying to capture an environment — we needed to

We came up with a proprietary way of moving a camera through an environment

John Toebes, Vice President of R&D

figure out how we can do it most efficiently, from a film and time perspective," says Toebes. "We came up with a proprietary way of moving a camera through an environment. It's not a

computer-controlled camera, but it isn't just a simple camera either. We've done a lot of things that require an understanding of how camera lens optics works

Temujin: The Capricorn Collection

SouthPeak's first game using the Video Reality engine looks to be quite impressive. With a production crew of over 180, it was created using special four-walled sets, "You actually had to crawl out one set through the fireplace," says Bob Tschudi, manager of creative development. "Not a good place for a claustrophobic cameraman." The game, written by Lee Sheldon (*The Riddle of Master Lu*) concerns a private museum where, contrary to the norm, artifacts are mysteriously appearing. Given Sheldon's track record and the technology behind the game, this is definitely a title adventure game fans should watch out for.

between spots. But once you make the choice, you may as well jump there because there is nothing interesting along the way." In a game using Video Reality, at any point along any path, the user has a full 360-degree view, and the ability to stop, change directions, whatever. There are some limits, though. "You can't show every spot from every angle. In some of our rooms, you can't go stand under the table," says Toebes. "We try to determine what people are likely to do and give them as much freedom as possible." Spatial video, as it is known in-house, can be seamlessly integrated with linear video, as well. For instance, you may walk past a



Thanks to SouthPeak's proximity to "Hollywood East," as North Carolina's burgeoning film industry is known, the company had access to top production and set design talent. SAS Institute provided the sound stage



SouthPeak spared no expense on the special effects in *Temujin*

and some specialized techniques." The process works either with video on a real set, or in a rendered environment, and the final output is in MPEG-1, running using software decoding, since no hardware decoders had the specialized features needed to play back the spatial video. Resolution is MPEG standard 352-by-240, although the capture system and development environment are ready for MPEG-2 and DVD. "It would take us about three days to switch over," Toebes says.

One of the advantages SouthPeak has had is a nearly unlimited budget for hiring talent. Toebes was formerly coordinator of the Software Distillery, and among things, was contracted by Commodore to do the Amiga DOS 2.0 operating system commands. He also wrote the compiler for the Amiga operating system that Commodore used to build the Amiga ROMs. Several other R&D people also come from the Amiga compiler world. The MPEG specialist wrote MPEG decoder chip microcode for Sun; Dr. Dick Smoke, one of the sound people, built audio environments for School for the Blind (as well as dissecting bats to unlock the processes of sonar); and some of the people who work on the game authoring kit have a background in telephone switching system software. "These people are used to producing software that has to run no matter what," says Toebes.

With more than 24 people in the R&D department working on the authoring system and libraries, the actual programming team for each game utilizing the technology is quite small — five or six people max. Actual game logic is coded with a Visual Basic-like scripting language. Game team members, who integrate video and art assets in the Video Reality Studio development system as



Unlike most *Myst* clones, the Video Reality engine (and interface) enables *Temujin* to feature hard-core, inventory based puzzles



well as implement puzzles, game logic, and features specific to individual games, have no access to the source code of the development system. Instead, they get it, fully functional, on CD. This is done so that the development system is ready to license at any time, although no plans have been set as of yet.

Although *Temujin*, the first game from SouthPeak to use Video Reality, took more than 18 months to complete, "We could probably have it done in half the time now," says David Johnston, title manager for SouthPeak. The company has plans to release games quarterly next year and then move to a bi-monthly release schedule.

Without gameplay, this impressive technology means nothing, and SouthPeak is well aware of that, which is why they've brought Lee Sheldon on board to handle design and writing duties for *Temujin* and their second game, a space western.

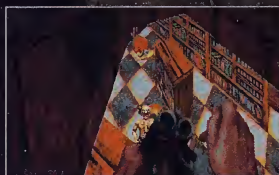
SouthPeak has had a nearly unlimited budget for hiring talent

SouthPeak's technology should finally bring video to computer games in a way that actually works. Without much fanfare or hype, a start-up (with an admittedly deep-pocketed corporate parent) whose only previous product was a jigsaw puzzle simulator, may have just developed the technology to advance adventure games further than any leap since the Infocom parser. And we'll leave you with this. Imagine a *Quake* clone with an environment of spatial video and characters rendered in 3D by a card that doesn't have to waste cycles doing the background. SouthPeak may have started a revolution in more than just adventure games...



The development system enables easy manipulation of video assets

sink into the



The Critics are Gushing with Praise:

Action! Humor! Atmosphere! Blood does it all with a heavy dose of horror!

-PC Gamer

Excellent level design, brilliant weapons... an excellent addition to the shooting genre.

-Next Generation On-Line



-PC Gaming Review

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GT[®]
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Heavy Gear



Similar look. Same designers. Improved gameplay. Different license. Activision hopes *Heavy Gear* can pull fans away from FASA.

Considering that Activision all but invented the mech combat computer sim, the loss of its *MechWarrior* license to the FASA/Micropose alliance wasn't likely to slow production of further games. The company has scoured the tabletop gaming market for a similarly popular prospect and has come up with *Heavy Gear*, allegedly the fourth most popular RPG/wargame in the U.S. The deal gives the company exclusive worldwide rights to the games for at least ten years.

The game is being coded by the *MechWarrior* 2 team, which now boasts Frank Evers, who worked on the impressive *Earthsiege 2* (the only robot game to give *Mech 2* a run for its money) for rival codeshop Dynamix. Indeed, the combination of using such a finely tweaked engine — one that for all intents and purposes has been in development for over five years — and the acquisition of the new license seems to have given a boost to the team's creative juices. Although the current project will focus, not surprisingly, on combat, the original pencil-and-paper game has strong (the team even claims "built-in") RPG tones. *Heavy Gear* is likely to be the first of many similarly themed games, which may include adventure and RPG titles in the future, as well as additional combat games.

It may have lost its license, but Activision hasn't lost the ability to crank out mech sims. Can *Heavy Gear* fill the FASA void?



Format:	PC CD-ROM
Publisher:	Activision
Developer:	Activision
Release Date:	4th Quarter 1997
Origin:	U.S.

This is not to say the current title won't be different from Activision's previous mech games, insists producer Chacko Sonny. "The *MechWarrior* games

"The *Heavy Gear* mechs are more human. They have character"

Chacko Sonny, Producer

were combat based, sure," he admits, "but *Heavy Gear* will add a number of new elements to the gameplay. These robots are a lot smaller than the Mechs, and their size and mobility allows for



MechWarrior's cockpit view has been exchanged for a less obstructed HUD view — heavy gears have a head-mounted camera, you see

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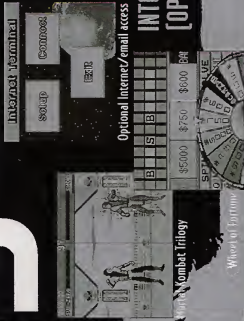
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Duke Nukem



Main Menu Screen



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have you seen it?
have you touched it?
have you played it?

TIGER

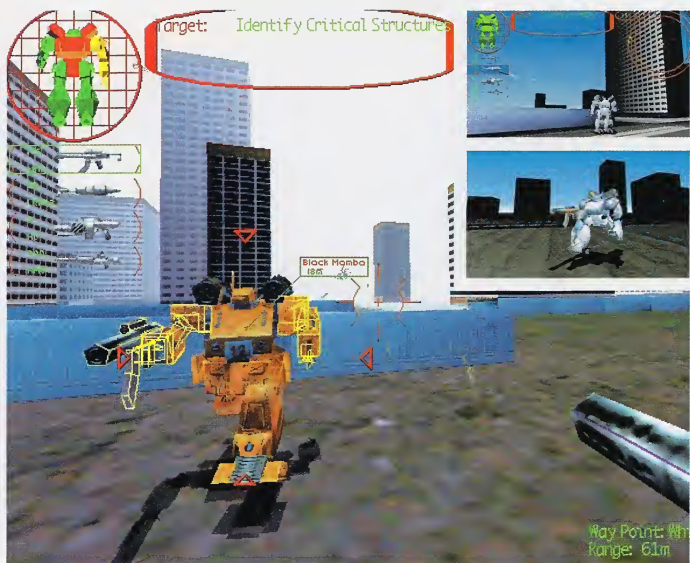
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C D

MENU SOUND PAUSE





The game supports Microsoft's Direct 3D API right out of the box (note the filtered textures). As with previous 3D-enhanced versions of the *MechWarrior* series, the results are especially realistic and breathtaking

interior shoot-outs, taking cover, side-stepping, and so on. They're a lot more human — they have a certain amount of character."

Enough background material certainly exists. The *Heavy Gear* universe has been mapped out in great detail by the tabletop version's creators, Dream Pod 9, which should give Activision's new game a depth and continuity similar to that of the *MechWarrior* series. However, the relative newness of the system —

from Activision's fans and pass on what the audience wants.

The *MechWarrior 2* engine has undergone its latest round of significant enhancements. "To begin with," explains director Tim Morten, "it's finally been completely Pentium-optimized." *Heavy Gear* will also be 100% D3D compatible, straight out of the box, and boasts higher polygon counts for the models (moving up from around 400 to at least 700), and hi-res textures. The detail of the models and textures is such that Sonny believes the game may well have to be released as a two-CD set. Patches will also be coded for individual 3D chipsets, so the PowerVR version will give the Gears real-time shadows, while the 3Dfx version will boast the now-obligatory bilinear filtering to smooth the textures.

With its evergreen theme of large-scale mobile-suit combat, and the proven track record of the design team, *Heavy Gear* is no doubt the closest Activision has to a sure thing for 1997.

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Fans will note *Heavy Gear* mechs are rounder than *MechWarrior* mechs

Heavy Gear is likely to be the first of many similarly themed games

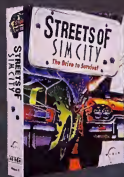
and, the more cynical would point out, that Dream Pod 9 is a small company made up of exactly nine writers (versus the burgeoning conglomerate that FASA has become) — has given Activision much more flexibility to expand on the source material to its own ends, which the FASA license did not allow. In fact, the team has one member whose job is simply to field e-mail and Usenet posts

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HAS BEEN YOUR

ONLY WEAPON

FOR TOO LONG





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emotions of the

6, China attacks Alaska over drops of oil in the world. force, but it will be ten years. In a desperate maneuver, neighboring countries in handling resources. The d by late 2076. S military y 2077.

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ARRIVING
AUGUST
1997

Meticulous turn-based combat system lets you target specific body parts to wound, cripple, or kill as you see fit.



Over 50 mini-quests with multiple solutions take you through devastated wastelands such as Rad Scorpion dens, Junktown, and the Brotherhood of Steel.



Victims don't just perish they get cut in half, melt into a pile of goo, and explode like a blood sausage into chunks of flesh.

Fallout

A POST NUCLEAR ROLE PLAYING GAME



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Adrenix

Format:	PC CD-ROM
Publisher:	Playmates
Developer:	Digital Dialect
Release Date:	November 1997
Origin:	U.S.

No one disputes that multiplayer games have stormed the PC, as players have found greater shared experiences outwitting fellow human opponents. But producer Chris Archer of Playmates has a vision to bring a compelling one-player, mission-based action game (with plenty of multiplayer options as well) to rich 3D environments.

"You'll see a game like this," Archer says, "and right off the bat you'll think 'oh, it's a corridor shooter or something like that.' We want to get away from that. It's story-driven and provides a lot of strategy and objective-based missions."

In the futuristic world of Archer's

"You may have to take out the mayor, or the mayor's limo"

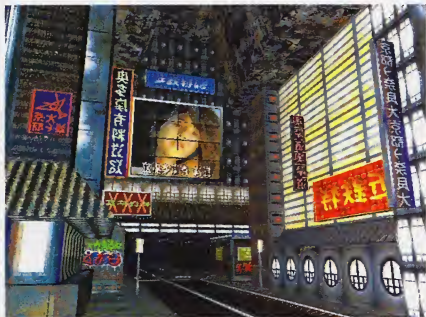
Chris Archer, Producer and Designer, Playmates

design (he's wearing two hats, as both designer and producer), domed cities have emerged from a post-apocalyptic earth. Archer tells a detailed story in which the player becomes an unwilling member of a resistance force to save his daughter.

From a cockpit or third-person view, players navigate 29 levels in a futuristic fighter that Archer estimates is the size of a Cadillac. Missions are more than find-the-key, Archer explains. In one level players must track an enemy supply truck moving through a city. In another, human characters are targeted.

"We have some targets that are humans," Archer grins. "You may have to take out the mayor, or the mayor's limo. So you can follow him and then blow the hell out of him. You know, you can blow the hell out of just about everything. We have buildings that are destructible, and some objectives require you to blow up

No dizzying *Descent*, a Playmates mission-based shooter steadies its course amid 3D landscapes



This finished city section of *Neon* displays a high level of detail, and the billboard is animated (top). An example of a finished ship (above)

the buildings."

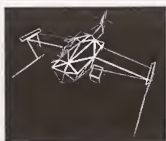
The game should support several 3D cards and several multiplayer modes for between eight and 16 players. Veteran game musician Tommy Tallarico is providing the score, which Archer describes as deep and moody.

"Until now, the only way most 3D shooters have kept from becoming repetitive," Archer says, "is with rich environments. *Adrenix* will have rich environments, nice scenery, and strategy-based gameplay. This is something different — not a whole lot of people have done this."

If Digital Direct can implement Archer's vision and Playmates handles the marketing right, this could be a major holiday season release.



These environments will be populated with civilians and enemies



From a sketch to a wireframe, this boss is under construction



REAL

“When you gaze into
the abyss, the abyss
also gazes into you.”

-Nietzsche



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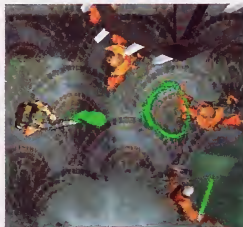
Actual Screen Shot

Take No Prisoners



The top-down perspective enables much more realistic graphical effects, especially for the 21 weapons that are available

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Brøderbund
Developer:	Raven
Release Date:	October 1997
Origin:	U.S.



Brøderbund returns to its roots with a new perspective (literally) on the heavily tapped shoot-'em-up genre

Brøderbund hasn't released an action game for the PC since *Prince of Persia 2*. The game most associated with Brøderbund these days, Cyan's stylishly plodding *Myst*, is as far from action as one can get. So it may be a surprise to see Brøderbund returning to its roots (*Karateka*, *Lode Runner*) with *Take No Prisoners*.

For *Prisoners*, the developers at Raven Software have scrapped the first-person view used in *Hexen*, *Heretic*, and the upcoming *Hexen II*. In its place is a top-down perspective very similar to *Loaded* for PlayStation (or *Allen Breed* on PC). "It was just a matter of resetting our thinking a bit," explains Brian Raffel, the co-founder of Raven Software. "We found ourselves using some things that were effective in first-person and trying alternatives that would be more successful in top-down. It was a real learning experience."

"It was just a matter of resetting our thinking a bit"

Brian Raffel, Co-Founder of Raven Software

Prisoners is set in (surprise, surprise!) a post-apocalyptic world, where nearly everyone has been killed or gruesomely mutated. Players will control Slade, a deadpanning mercenary

Take No Prisoners offers more than enough blood and guts to sate even the most rabid shoot-'em-up fan (top left, middle). The scenery appropriately varies from level to level (bottom left, right)

similar to Ben from *Full Throttle*, who is hired by a large company to infiltrate a dome filled with survivors and steal their "Refractive Matrix Crystal." This crystal will enable the company to make its own dome.

Raven has created a deeper world than in the typical first-person shooter. The 20 levels in *Prisoners* possess distinct styles. The prison level is poorly lit and dirty, while the cathedral is bright and immaculate, with confessionals and stained-glass windows.

Two different scrolling modes let players explore these levels. One is similar to *Total Carnage*, with the player locked into the center of the screen; the

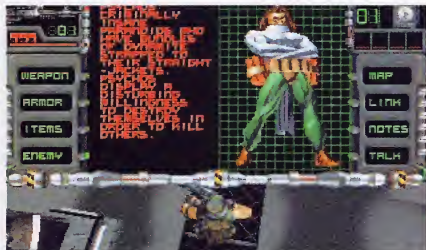
Raven has created a deeper world than in the typical shooter

other is reminiscent of *Ikari Warriors*, where the player is set at the bottom, with the full screen devoted to his or her line of sight.

"We all love playing first-person games," says Steve Schreck, the producer of *Prisoners*. "But the great thing about a top-down perspective is the ability to convey a realistic sense of people surrounding you or converging upon you, and that's really what this game is about." The demo shown to **Next Generation** supports his claim; the new engine, combined with the sprite-based characters, makes it possible for many more enemies to be on the screen at once.

But there won't just be more enemies onscreen at once than in your typical first-person shooter; there will be more enemies, period. There are 22 different enemies, from the obligatory dogs and zombies to more inventive foes, such as nerds and yuppies. Choosing just how to attack these monsters may be difficult. There are 21 weapons to choose from. Not surprisingly, *Doom*-style guns are recycled (the shotgun is evidently an ESRB requirement), with promising additions like the energy saber, flame thrower, and shuriken. In addition, players will have access to five vehicles, from a simple transport to a weapon-laden boat.

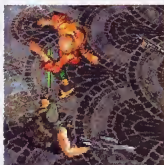
Where *Prisoners* may really shine is in multiplayer mode. Raven is promising eight-player support, with hopes of supporting as many as 16 players by the



Prisoners displays good coordination between the help screens and the actual game. Yes, those pools of blood used to be "Psychos"

time the game ships in October. The popular modes are represented (Deathmatch, Cooperative, Capture the Flag), along with some promising new modes of play. Among them are "Assassin" mode, a variation of the children's game where each competitor has a designated target, and "Arsenal" mode, where every player possesses every weapon to start with, in an attempt to remedy the king-of-the-rocket-launcher problem found in *Quake* deathmatches.

Prisoners offers a refreshing respite from the endless march of *Doom/Duke/Quake* clones, while still providing plenty of action. Instead of falling back on the lucrative recipes they recently have offered, Raven and Brøderbund have branched out into a genre that hasn't seen daylight on the PC in years. Perhaps other companies will follow their lead. ng



The varying zoom factors add a high level of realism, especially as concerns the enemies

THE POWER REVOLUTIONARIES
INTERVIEW

DIVA LA REVOLUCIÓN



Tomb Raider's fiery LARA CROFT is one of the most recognized figures of the PowerVR™ Revolution. A confrontationalist, she has grown tired of the old 3D Order. With passion and anger, LARA has been relentlessly fanning the flames of revolutionary justice for gamers around the world.

WELCOME TO THE MOVEMENT. APPARENTLY, DISCOVERING ANCIENT TOMBS HAS FAILED TO SATISFY THE RADICAL HUNGRERS THAT GNAW AT YOUR SOUL?

Lara Croft: My first passion will always be exploring ancient civilizations. But when I realized gamers were being kept down by inferior 3D technology, I went ballistic. I'm busting my arse to get gamers the 3D experience they deserve.

SO THE BLAND 3D EXPERIENCE WAS BOUND TO PRODUCE A REVOLT?

L: Absolutely. But this is an armed struggle, love. And the weapon is not the Colt .45 in my hand. It's the PowerVR 3D technology that will topple the bloody awful 3D experience.

ARE YOU SAYING EVERYTHING ABOUT CONVENTIONAL 3D TECHNOLOGIES DESERVES TO PERISH—SHOVE OFF TO THE ASH HEAP OF OBSCOLESCENCE?

L: Bloody right, mate. Gamers want 3D technology that liberates their experience. Like higher resolution. Higher frame rates. Effects that take them as close to reality as you can get.

LIBERATION SEEMS TO BE A CENTRAL THEME DRIVING THE MOVEMENT.

L: Look, if I could escape the suffocating arrogance of snooty British society, gamers could overthrow the forces trying to smash the PowerVR resistance. That's what pumps adrenaline through my body.

UM, DON'T TAKE THIS THE WRONG WAY LARA, BUT THAT'S SOME BODY.

L: Actually, you should see it at 800x600 resolution. I think you'd dig my aerial flips with realistic shadows.

WHEW, WELL, UH...SO LARA, THESE ARE EXCITING, TURBULENT TIMES. GAMERS AND GAME DEVELOPERS SEEM TO BE GETTING SWEEP UP IN THE PROMISE OF POWERVR.

L: That's right. Our freedom fighters are developing games right now that are PowerVR Ready. Eidos, Kallisto, Shiny, Sega Entertainment, FASA, Activision, Core Design, Gremlin. All feverishly churning out PowerVR Ready titles, including my next adventure, Tomb Raider 2.

WOULD YOU SAY THE MOVEMENT IS OBSESSED WITH POWER?

L: Of course, you twit. Frankly, we're not stopping until we have profoundly altered 3D reality for all gamers. And we will! Because we have finally seized the ultimate apparatus of real 3D power.

THE POWERVR TECHNOLOGY?

L: Yes. And with it, there will be no obstacles that can stand in the way of the mission of the PowerVR revolution: to produce the most realistic game experience imaginable. Now bugger off, I've got a battle to fight.



Tomb Raider



MDK



MechWarrior 3



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NEC

GEX: Enter the Gecko



On the run in the haunted house level, Gex is chased by transparent ghosts and a knife-wielding, possessed doll, "Huckie." Sound familiar?

Gex is a title many might consider the essential platform game of the failed 3D0 system. While the game never pushed any 3D boundaries, the title character's quirky dialogue, TV-themed worlds, and wall-crawling play mechanics made for an enjoyable game. Two years later, Gex is set to return in *Enter the Gecko*, still cracking his whip of a tail, clinging to walls, and mouthing one-liners — only now in a completely 3D environment.

"It presents new and interesting problems for us to solve," says senior game designer Richard Lemarchand about working in 3D. "It also creates huge new gameplay possibilities,

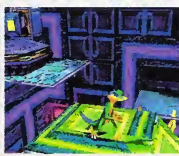
"Everything in the 3D environment is a potential play surface"

Richard Lemarchand, Senior Game Designer

because you really can have path branches going off in all directions. As the game's designers, we have to think about how we can help the player perceive the spatiality of our levels, and I think that's the most important thing for anyone coming to 3D platform game design."

In a nutshell, the several levels shown to *Next Generation* present a richly lit

From 3D0 to a 3D model, Crystal's tail-bopping lizard returns in this fleshed-out sequel



Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	TBA
Developer:	Crystal Dynamics
Release Date:	November 1997
Origin:	U.S.

and deeply textured world, like *Crash Bandicoot*'s, with about the same range of freedom as *Tomb Raider* and action on par with *Mario*. Crystal's design team was very wary of comparisons to *Bubsy*, the 2D platform Bobcat whose leap to 3D wasn't nearly as inspired.

"Almost every location in *Bubsy* 3D felt the same," says lead designer Daniel Arey. "Because of the different shapes that Richard and other people have done in the level and the different lighting, you always know where you are in this. For instance, every door is familiar. It's like, 'Oh yeah, this is the triangular door,' or 'This is the door with the raised stepway.' It makes it very easy for players to map out the environment in 3D."

Gex can "facestick" to some surfaces and climb on walls and ceilings, so the designers have really been able to maximize the 3D environment. "I think this is the thing that really knocks Gex into the 21st century," Lemarchand says,



Low poly enemies like this Pterodactyl sport a surprisingly clean look

"because suddenly everything in the 3D environment is a potential play surface, not just the floor, which was the case with *Crash* and *Bubsy* and even *Mario*." Lemarchand, a veteran 16-bit designer who speaks the Queen's English,

Many secrets will be found only by exploratory climbing

explains that he created a maze on the ceiling through which Gex must navigate.

Arey, who worked on design of the original *Gex*, cuts in to explain that many secrets will be found in places only reached by exploratory climbing.

"Suddenly," Arey says, "it's like *Descent* *Gecko*. You're basically moving around

everywhere, not just confined to a simple flat plane or even the stair-step plane, you're actually

getting up on that wall — so 3D means something."

Of course, the plot puts Gex in a situation similar to the first game's. This time Gex is working as an "X-Files"-type agent sent to capture Rez, which means traversing more cable-channel themed levels as in the original. According to Scott Steinburg, Crystal's VP of marketing, the worlds will be just as diverse. "The feedback from the first *Gex*," Steinburg says, "was that the tile sets were so diverse that when you were in, for instance, the kung-fu levels, it was dramatically different from being in the cartoon levels, and people loved that." While some themes return, like the Horror world and the Cartoon world, Steinburg insists that the level of parody will be taken to a riskier extreme.

Enter the Gecko already boasts some superior technology and will be compatible with Sony's new dual-analog control pad. Comedian Dana Gould will also return to help write and voice Gex's one-liners. And, because the little lizard's 3D-modeled face can move to 12 animated phonetic positions, Gex will actually be lip-synched in real time to the voice-over.

Not too long ago, many industry pundits were uncertain whether Crystal would reemerge after a major studio downsizing. However, *Enter the Gecko* should put another strong 3D feather in PlayStation's cap and may give *Blasto* (see cover feature on page 56) a run for its money. Considering this product's strength and the company's refocus, Crystal and Gex are poised to leap ahead to where some mascots only dream of climbing.

ng



Dual-analog controls give the player free reign over the camera



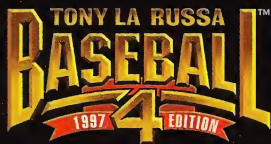
A sidekick has been added, and the tail-whip returns as the staple attack. Gex can knock the limbs off of zombies — those missing a leg will proceed to hop after him

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Populous 3



Populous 3 is in full 3D, although the environment is still manipulated by tiles (note cursor on hill, right and near temple, above)

As *Dungeon Keeper's* epic development cycle draws to a close, Bullfrog will be looking for its first hit sans founder Peter Molyneux. *Populous 3* may deliver just that. Though based heavily on the now eponymous concept pioneered in his original *Populous*, Molyneux's input on this game has been limited, the task falling instead to project manager and programmer Alan Wright and artist Paul McLaughlin.

The real-time rotatable/scalable environment marks a huge departure for the series, and although the effects already look impressive (the landscape builds, warps, and deforms in real time), Bullfrog promises full 3D-card support to



The art has come a long way since the original Amiga version



Can Bullfrog continue the success of the *Populous* franchise without Peter Molyneux?



Format:	Win 95, PlayStation
Publisher:	Electronic Arts
Developer:	Bullfrog
Release Date:	September (PC), November (PS-X)
Origin:	England

add transparencies, reflections and filtered textures to the proceedings.

The potential is awe-inspiring. Players will have an entire planet under their control, with the ability to zoom in and out of the globe, to see as much or as little of the maps as they wish, and to create mountains, lakes, seas, storms, and cities on a whim. The rival gods from the previous games will also play their parts and inflict plagues, famines, and wars upon the player's unfortunate subjects. The real-time 3D should give the planet a "living" feel that the game's turn-based ancestors could never hope to match. Multiplayer options have not yet been determined, but expect some form of Internet play.

With so many forthcoming real-time games clinging so sadly and obviously to the *Command & Conquer* formula, *Populous 3*, with its rich heritage and unique gameplay, should find success as easily as if Molyneux had worked on it himself.

ng

More levels than a Tokyo skyscraper



Tanks, bulldozers, boats, forklifts: Drive to kill



Hand to face combat mode: Kick butt karate-style



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before and put on your combat sandals...

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GameSlate Weekly



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Skullmonkeys



Yep, it's a sidescroller, but the world, and all the characters in it, are made from clay models. Klaymen, from *The Neverhood*, stars again

Doug TenNapel, the man behind the character of Earthworm Jim, is very tall. When **Next Generation** walks into the president of Neverhood's office, TenNapel is sitting on a couch hunched over a cutting board. When he rises to shake hands, it becomes obvious that he's well over six feet. On the cutting board that he's put aside rests a three-dimensional clay logo he's been trimming for the Neverhood's second game, *Skullmonkeys*.

"*Skullmonkeys* is a butt-bouncing, old-fashioned platform game" TenNapel says. While the game features

"This will be the most graphically unique game on PS-X, period"

Doug TenNapel, President, Neverhood

the same protagonist, Klaymen, and antagonist, Klog, as the Neverhood's first, self-titled adventure, the similarities end there. The game is set on the planet of the Skull Monkeys, a race of dumb, skull-headed apes Klog has convinced to attack the Neverhood.

And yes, the game is actually 2D. TenNapel understands this sounds odd due to the industry-wide thrust in 3D game development.

"We would rather play *Defender*," he says adamantly, pausing to imitate

Can the creator of *Earthworm Jim* and his company build a solid 32-bit 2D platformer?



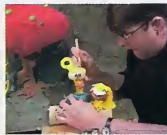
Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	DreamWorks Interactive
Developer:	The Neverhood
Release Date:	September 1997
Origin:	U.S.

Defender's laser sounds, "than *Twisted Metal*. I finished *Twisted Metal* and was like, 'That's it?' I liked it, but it felt like they were trying to preserve their 3D engine and trying to fit gameplay around it."

TenNapel believes that mixing 3D with a platform game is a recipe for disaster, noting the problematic depth-perception issues that have plagued 3D, 32-bit platformers. Many would agree, but convincing the same audience of the merits of a 2D sidescroller for PlayStation has obviously been a trying experience. He's relying on the company's artistic strengths to pull it off.

"Our game will be the most graphically unique game on PlayStation, period," TenNapel says. "Clay animation and clay-sculpted photographed sets are more 3D than 3D because it's real 3D, not simulated. You couldn't approach the amount of sculpting we get with these characters in detail with polygons."

Undertaking this task is a veteran 2D development staff with impressive backgrounds. "The team that created *Earthworm Jim*'s content and humor works here now," TenNapel says. And he carefully lists the credits of his fellow Shiny expatriates, including Mark



The crew hard at work on models for the intro sequence (top, above)

Lorenzen, the creator of *Vectorman*, and Mike Dietz, inventor of the "animation" process used in the 16-bit *Aladdin* and *Earthworm Jim* games.

And like *Earthworm Jim*, Klaymen has been endowed with some comical gameplay mechanics. Klaymen's weapons include "farthead," which enables him to clone a gaseous version of himself and walk unharmed through the world. Klaymen can also unleash a smart-bomb entitled "Universe Enema" which is as effective as it is humorously animated.

"There'll be 100 unique areas in the game," TenNapels proudly relays. "I hate saying '100' because it's kind of a cheater. There are many sublevels based around 20 unique tile sets." He also believes that his design team can offer interesting enough atmospheres to keep players going. Each level presents solid, balanced gameplay. "We try not make what we call 'cheesy rips' in the game, like near impossible jumps — there will be no blind jumps in the game," TenNapel offers.

For the audio of *Skullmonkeys*, the team is planning plenty of dialogue and has brought back the music of Terry Taylor, who recorded the strange drunken blues in *The Neverhood*. For *Skullmonkeys*, TenNapel told Taylor to take it to the next level. "And he's coming up with this Hawaiian shit, like Don Ho. And we're like 'Go! Go!' because it's so stupid and so nongaming that we have to embrace it."

Embracing *Skullmonkeys* might require an acceptance of TenNapel's vision. "I see gaming as another art medium," he voices. "It's not television, it's not Hollywood, it's not a movie. But it is a legitimate place for artists and programmers to express themselves in a direction where hopefully the audience will elevate its understanding of games. We're not making Happy Meals here,



Environments range from the pastoral to the industrial. Obstacles include traditional fire hazards and the bizarre enemy Skullmonkeys

we're making interactive experiences."

Certainly *The Neverhood* is bringing a unique look to gaming in general, and it's impossible not to get excited by the highly creative art-house vibe the crew

"I see gaming as another art medium. It's not television"

Doug TenNapel

gives off. But with old-school gameplay, TenNapel recognizes the potential backlash. "We're probably gonna get crucified for doing this," he says. "But we want to do a game that is fun the way NES and Genesis games used to be fun." And without any seeming competition, he's right to point out that there hasn't been a 32-bit, 2D, "butt-bouncer" yet. "I think there's room for one very potent platform game," TenNapel says cautiously. "And that's what ours is. We're that one."

ng



Enemies (above) are first drawn to work as level placeholder animations



All of Klaymen's motions were penciled. Then, with the help of an editing machine, they were used in tandem with a model to record the animation



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Dave's Sega Saturn Page
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www.vfhome.com



www.videogames2.com



www.evansville.net/~tyrant21/duke.html



www.escape.ca/~tpeters/gamers.html.com

TUE. 1



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WED. 2
PSX

THUR. 3
SATURN

CANADA DAY SPECIAL
Next Generation Online investigates the creative explosion in Canada and profiles three of the leading developers.

QUAKE COMPETITION
Stomped sponsors "The Golden Gibbs" quake competition. An invite only competition, which features prominent webmasters in the Quake community. Check out <http://www.stomped.com> for details.

SCAVENGER HUNT
Join the Video Game Links Scavenger Hunt. Be the first to find everything on the list and win free stuff.

VIDEO GAME LINKS CHAT
Chat about the outlook of gaming for the second half of the year at Game Buzz. Chat begins at 7 PM. PST.

CAST YOUR VOTE
Videogamers.com asks: "What is the best video game of all time?" We'll be posting your comments as well. Don't miss out on this special poll.

TROUBLESHOOTING LIVE
Got questions? We've got answers. The editors of PSXPower will be on hand in the PSXPower Palace room to answer your gaming questions.

TALKING JAPANESE
Import games are a large part of the serious Saturn owner's portfolio. SaturnWorld gives you the top fifty Japanese terms every hard-core gamer needs to know to play the games.

FRI. 4



MON. 7



TUE. 8



WED. 9
ULTRA
GAME PLAYERS

THUR. 10
NEXT
ONLINE

FRI. 11



MON. 14



FOURTH OF JULY POLL
Win a "Third Generation Great Gaming Stuff Box" in a special forum poll.

FIRST PERSON N64
Nintendo is seeing a massive load of first-person games arrive on its system. Are first-person games all washed up? Will Turok 2, Unreal, Quake, and Daikatana help to revive this tiring genre. An N64.com report.

ONLINE INTERVIEW
PlayStation Nation interviews Denis Dyack of Silicon Knights (creators of Legacy of Kain). Join us, as Denis talks about his new project, his thoughts on the industry, and how he got interested in video games.

BOOT'S LATEST FEATURES
A must see event for all PC fanatics. Read the latest opinions and news from boot magazine on bootNet.com.

MID-TERM REPORT
The best of '97 - thus far: A mid-year report from Ultra Game Players Online on the games of 1997 that have impressed us the most.

SPORTS EXTRAVAGANZA
Next Generation Online explores the best forthcoming sports games for each console with exclusive screen-shots and Quicktime movies.

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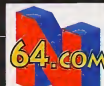
PC GAMER'S TOP PICKS
Which games will you be playing at the end of the year. PC Gamer Online picks the top ten likely contenders.



www.next-generation.com



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Every day, one of the seven sites in the Imagine Games Network hosts a special event. These include interviews, chat forums, downloads and extra features. And they're all absolutely free.

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J U L Y

TUE. 15



PERIPHERALS CONTEST

Improve your gaming with PSXPower. Enter PSXPower's contest and you could find yourself with tons of great peripherals.



RPG REPORT

GEO Examines why RPGs have such a great appeal, and how they have influenced the gaming industry. GEO editors feature all of the past great RPGs, as well as point out which ones look hot in the future.

WED. 16



MULTI-PLAYER MADNESS

N64.com takes a look at the multi-player game library. Yes, Mario Kart 64 was fun, but is it still good in four-player mode? We tell what's coming up, what looks good, and how the four player feature measures up to gamers expectations.

THUR. 17



IGN EDITORS DEBATE

See our editors duke it out in streaming video in a battle for console supremacy.

FRI. 18



SUPER PALACE DAY

Join the IGN editors plus special guests on the Palace for a mammoth Q&A session.

MON. 21



HEAVY GEAR DIARIES

Starting today, Next Generation Online will begin closely following the development of Activision's eagerly anticipated follow-up to Mechwarrior 2. Expect to see anecdotes from the developers, new screen-shots and concept art.

TUE. 22



BOOT REVIEWS

Catch up on what's tops for your PC with bootNet.com's latest batch of reviews.



THUR. 24



SPOTLIGHT ON GAME MUSIC

GEO features game music with insider interviews, reader polls, articles, reviews, and more.

SATURN MUSIC DAY

Sega's games have some of the best music in the business. Who writes them and how do they do it? Plus, download some great tunes with SaturnWorld.

FRI. 25



PC GAMER PALACE DAY

Join PC Gamer and some industry stars on the Palace for a chat.

MON. 28



GENESIS TREASURES

A look back on some of the most influential and well made Sega Genesis titles ever made with Ultra Game Players Online. Plus, how these classics influence the games of today.

TUE. 29



SATURNWORLD POLL

The Saturn's in third place. Sega makes fantastic games. Should Sega make games for another platform? If so, which one?



CONTEST

The GEO Contest For Free Stuff. Check www.gaming-enthusiast.com for details.

WED. 30



N64 ADD-ONS

A full report on third-party peripherals from N64.com. Mad Catz, Interact, and Nuby will just a few of the companies whose steering wheels, controllers, Memory Paks will be rated.

THUR. 31



ASCII CHAT

ASCII will be present in the PSXPower Palace room to talk about two of their hot, new games, Felony 11-79 and Clocktower.

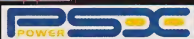
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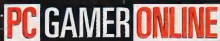
The Last Refuge for the True Gamer. SaturnWorld brings you the latest worldwide information on Sega's premier 32-bit platform, the Saturn. Updated daily, SaturnWorld reports on Sega's triumphs and struggles, where it's been, and where it is going, with news, codes, reviews, previews, and the strongest Saturn community this side of the television screen.

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ng alphas



Tonic Trouble

Developer and publisher Ubi Soft stakes out its first claim in 3D territory with a fancy new title



From the developers of *Rayman* comes *Tonic Trouble*, which shows much of the same unique character and background design

French developer and publisher Ubi Soft has shown a strange willingness of late to jump on any new technological wrinkle. *Pod* was one of the first announced MMX-compatible titles, while MMX was still just a pile of printed opcodes and "seconds-per-frame" emulators. Now it's at it again with *Tonic Trouble* (formerly

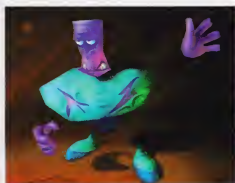
***Tonic Trouble* is only the second game we've heard of for DVD-ROM**

known as *Ed*), only the second game *Next Generation* has learned of — a deluxe collection of Westwood's *Red Alert* is the other — planned for release on DVD-ROM.

The game itself is a

combination of action and adventure, set in the increasingly familiar fully 3D world as seen from a third-person perspective. However, the *Tonic Trouble* team within Ubi Soft is the same one responsible for the *Rayman* series, one of the 2D era's latter-day bright spots.

The game follows the adventures of the extraterrestrial *Ed*, who rushes to right the havoc he caused by accidentally releasing a mysterious canister he was transporting on Earth — not the least of which is that the planet



These strange denizens are typical of the stylish French approach

Format:	N64, PC CD-ROM, DVD-ROM
Publisher:	Ubi Soft
Developer:	Ubi Soft
Release Date:	Fall 1997
Origin:	France

has been turned upside-down. Various potions and other odd fluids are scattered about as a result of the accident, and *Ed* can gain new powers through different combinations.

The planned Nintendo 64 version should follow the PC versions and should be ready for release by early '98. *Rayman* was notable for its lush color schemes, nicely tweaked level design, and gentle humor, and, from what *Next Generation* has seen of *Tonic Trouble*, there's no reason to believe the team has lost the touch in the move to polygons — at least from a visual perspective. While cartoonish, the game looks quite nice indeed. If the gameplay can match the graphics, this may be another needed bright spot for Nintendo 64.

ng



Lead character *Ed* shows the same disconnected appendages as *Rayman*

June/July 1997

Issue 2

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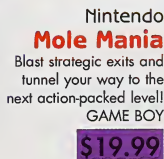
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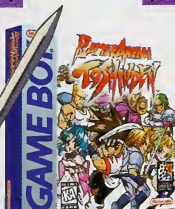
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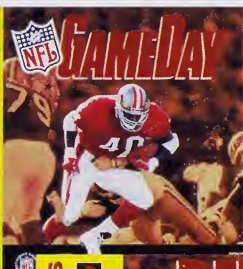
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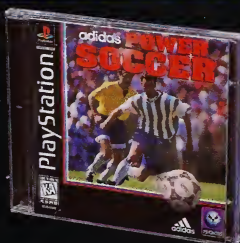
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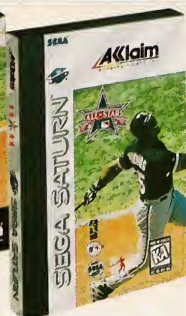
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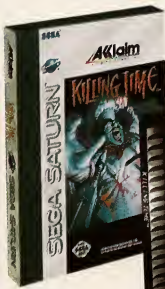


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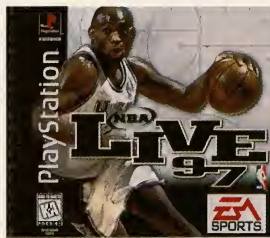
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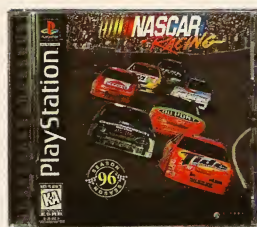
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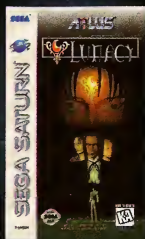
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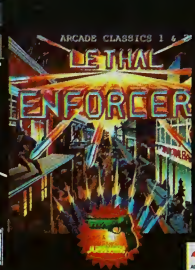
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The way games ought to be...

In search of the future of gameplay

This is the first of a new series of columns I'll be writing for **Next Generation** on cutting-edge game and interactive entertainment design. From the outset, let me publicly apologize for stealing the name of the column from Chris Crawford's series of "Hi-Octane Gameplay" essays which ran in **Next Generation** from issues 12 to 17. Although I sincerely hope to bring Chris's wit and insight to my own work, I can claim only to distantly track his footsteps on the subject of the future of gameplay. Unfortunately, **Next Generation** published all of Chris's suitable essays, and he is simply too busy to author any more at this point.

So that leaves me to report on what Chris and all the other visionaries in the field of computer and videogames are up to. A few of my own ideas will probably get thrown in along the way, but don't panic, I'll try to keep them to a minimum. But first I'm going to take the opportunity to explain just why I think this whole subject is so important...

A long, long time ago...

In the final chapters of Douglas Adams's book *The Restaurant At The End Of The Universe*, Arthur Dent (a human being from the year 1980), accompanied by his friend Ford Prefect (an alien from a small planet somewhere in the vicinity of Betelgeuse), finds himself home on the planet Earth but transported back in time to a prehistoric era inhabited by club-wielding, hide-wearing cavemen. Earth is a lush, green, unspoiled wilderness, and, inspired by the chance of a new start for the human race, Arthur wastes no time trying to encourage and nurture the cavemen's evolution. He sets about this daunting task by teaching them how to play Scrabble. Arthur concedes that it doesn't work ("The only word they know is grunt and they can't spell it").

But Arthur, Ford, and the cavemen aren't the only "human" life on Earth: A crashed spaceship from Golgafrincham, carrying all of that society's "middlemen" (hairdressers, tired TV producers, insurance salesmen, public relations executives, and so on) has resulted in a second race of humanoid who, for the time being at least, are calling Earth their home. These displaced Golgafrinchans are juvenile and ridiculous: Their leader (the captain of the doomed spaceship) spends his whole day in the bath; because they have decreed that leaves be their new official currency, they are happy to brag that the entire population of Golgafrinchans are "millionaires"; they declare war on the

neighboring continent, even though no one lives there yet ("we interrogated a gazelle"); and to counter the inflation caused by everyone being a millionaire, their solution is to burn down all the forests in the surrounding countryside.

Sure, the Golgafrinchans' life is comfortably, relatively painless, and fun. But Arthur quickly realizes that their wasteful, childish existence is a threat to the survival of the cavemen. Despite all the hustle and bustle, his hopes and dreams for a brave new era of human life on Earth will not be realized by the Golgafrinchans (indeed, they seem to exemplify — with worrying accuracy — all that had been wrong with humankind on Earth as it had seemed to Arthur back in 1980). To him, it's very clear what the future of a mankind descended from them would be like: "Advanced" life on earth wouldn't be drastically different from that of the spacewrecked community. There would be no reason to evolve or grow into more sophisticated beings because they would be able to lazily continue along their comfy, established path.

No, the Golgafrinchans' frivolous way of living confirms Arthur's suspicion that mankind's only chance for a more advanced, challenging future rests on the hairy shoulders of the noble

In the past, I've loved videogames and I've hated videogames

cavemen. Primitive and unadvanced though they may seem, they are free of the cumbersome baggage of a predisposed "way of doing things" and so have the potential to grow, to evolve, and to explore a whole world of new possibilities. It's unlikely that either culturally or literally the Golgafrinchans will ever get out of the bath.

But the cavemen are dying out. Despite Arthur's frenzied Scrabble tuition and his best hopes, he eventually has to accept Ford's observation that, painful as it may seem, the future of mankind will descend from the thriving aliens. The cavemen are perishing, and with them Arthur's dreams of a future with untold promise. "This planet is having a pretty bloody time of it," concludes Arthur.

More on this later...

So what's all this got to do with videogames?

I've been in the videogame business for almost seven years and a player for most of my life. As editor-in-chief of **Next Generation** since the

by Neil West

Neil West is
Next Generation's
editor-at-large



magazine's launch back in November of 1994, I've had the privilege both of seeing the game industry from the inside and of meeting many of my heroes. Nevertheless, a few months ago I decided it was time to move on.

My main reason for leaving is that I was becoming increasingly apathetic to the wave after wave of "same old" games that poured into the **Next Generation** offices with each FedEx delivery. In the past, I've loved videogames and I've hated videogames — the point being that I've cared deeply about videogames. But now, for me at least, yet another game-in-which-you-run-around-shooting-things just doesn't cut the mustard anymore. May Dr. Robotnik imprison all my woodland chums in robo-suits or may the cops find me hanging by my Jopay cable, I really can't get particularly worked up about yet another one-on-one fighting game or yet

another real-time strategy title — and I don't care how many millions of polygons are rendered onscreen each second. The same goes for every other genre of game — adventures included — in which the summit of

interhuman communication amounts to "asking-the-innkeeper-about-the-sword" or a sidewinder missile between the eyeballs. And so it's time for me to move on and pass the helm of the world's best videogame mag to those who are as passionate about gaming as I used to be. Why my change of heart? Because I've become intrigued with what "interactive entertainment" could be — and it's getting harder and harder for me to settle for what we've got.

Let me explain. Working at **Next Generation** has given me the chance to talk with many of gaming's "prophets in the desert," such as Chris Crawford and Brian Moriarty, who have offered tantalizing peeks at what greater goals game companies could be working toward. Listen to these idealistic visionaries for just five minutes and you'll realize that the interactive entertainment medium holds so much potential for revolutionizing how humans can explore new ideas and "virtual worlds," that it's staggering. The capacity to entertain (and communicate, and educate, and heal, and all manner of other unexplored possibilities)

inherent in this wonderful medium in which the "audience" can actually participate in huge.

"Unlike every other medium that came before it, the interactive medium can make a point to people by actually making them go through something," enthused Brian Moriarty when interviewed in **NG 19**. "You could put people at the lever of the controls of a gas chamber. You could put people in the shoes of a doctor who needs to perform an abortion. You could put people in the shoes of a soldier. You can make people actually feel what it's like to do something. There's no other medium that can do this. What an opportunity!" Moriarty expounded. "But instead we do *Doom*." And you know what, he's right to be disappointed.

Think about it. Despite all the flash and technical brilliance of videogaming in 1997, why don't any games let you rely on your sense of humor to get you through an encounter with an adversary? Why do so many games involve killing things? Why is the communication between the game and the player so one-sided (everything you can "say" has to be boiled down to a combination of button presses or joystick movements)? Why do games ask players to make many strategic choices but never any moral choices? Why can't you really talk to anyone in a game (and selecting from pre-defined phrases doesn't count)? Why are there no games in which you attempt to win the heart of a beautiful woman (and no, bludgeoning all the Zombies who have "enslaved" her doesn't count)?

Sure, gamers in 1997 have plenty of reasons to be cheerful, and by conventional standards games have never been better: Enormous strides are being taken within established game genres; Nintendo 64 finally seems close to realizing its potential as a kick-ass game console; PlayStation's impressive library of games looks set to grow with the likes of *Final Fantasy VII*, *Bushido Blade*, and *Blasto*; Saturn has AM2's conversion of *Virtua Fighter III* and a host of other state-of-the-art arcade conversions to look forward to; and the continued emergence of online gaming as a whole new platform in its own right can't fail to get pulses racing. But 90% of the efforts being made are devoted to taking existing games and simply making them look better. Sure, new features get thrown in along the way, but fundamentally, games in 1997 aren't that much different underneath from those of five, ten, and sometimes even 15 years ago. This doesn't mean that they're not fun, but that to a large extent, the game industry seems happy to continue reinventing the wheel. Perhaps Chris

Crawford best articulates this sense of exasperation at the relatively primitive state of videogaming today in his essay, "Some thoughts on Box Copy" (originally published in *Interactive Entertainment Design*, Vol. 7 Number 4):

"Jason Kargill sat alone at a table in the darkest corner of the little cantina. His fingers nervously caressed the handle of the laser blaster strapped to his hip. Through eyes narrowed to slits he watched the steady stream of customers coming and going. They widened slightly when the Zlarix walked in. So this was the

Think about it. Why do so many games involve killing things?

one he'd been waiting to see all this time. This was the partner who would teach him to be a... Starlane Raider!!!

"How many times have we all seen opening lines like these on [the packaging of] our games? Dripping with melodrama, the text shouts romance, excitement, and adventure. It makes you want to buy that game, rush home, and enter the colorful world it promises—which of course is the whole purpose of the prose.

"There's a problem with this, though: Have you ever noticed that the game you play really has nothing whatsoever to do with the text? You don't get to nervously caress the handle of your laser blaster; instead, you jerk your cursor all over the screen and blast hundreds of little green monsters over and over and over. You don't narrow your eyes to slits as you watch whomever; instead, you are guided through a bunch of cut-screens showing a random collection of absurd aliens. You don't betray your expectation when your new partner walks through the door; instead, you wander through long, confusing mazes in search of obscure

The game you play really has nothing to do with the [box] text

puzzle parts.

"Do you see the difference between the purple prose and the game? The copy drips with overdone emotion, but the game doesn't have any emotion, just a lot of logic and action. Isn't that odd? If our opening text were more honest about gameplay, it would read like this:

"Jason Kargill hunched forward. Streams of odd-shaped blue things with big teeth appeared in front of him. He pointed his laser blaster frantically around the room, blasting them. They kept coming, bigger and faster, and he kept blasting. Then there were green things with

bloodshot eyes, and he blasted them, too. After a while, they stopped coming, so he walked into another room where he saw a bunch of orange things with claws, and he blasted 30 or so, then walked into another room....

"Now this would be a lot more honest, wouldn't it? This would really communicate what the game is about. So why do we need that other kind of introduction? What deficiency in our games does the original text make up for? We are really like a little kid on a tricycle. We pedal our tricycle furiously, shouting

"Vroom!" at the top of our lungs, and 'Here comes the fire truck!' Then we point our fingers at the tree and make watery noises. 'Put out the fire!' We cry gleefully. It's all great good fun. But what's really odd is that, as

we grow older and more experienced, instead of actually building fire trucks, we just keep building bigger tricycles..."

Several other game designers in mainstream videogame companies rally to the flag and clamor for change, but amid the roar of platform wars, rushed production schedules, and higher stakes and ever riskier business environments, their voices are seldom, if ever, listened to.

Of course, serious technological hurdles stand in the way of games offering the kind of game experiences that Chris is alluding to, but this is no excuse for not trying to leap them. If over the next few years the game industry puts as much research and development resources into working on in-game interpersonal relationships and interactive storytelling as it has previously put into graphics, then there's no reason why gaming can't evolve into a whole new art form.

Certainly, the game industry continues to merely scratch the surface of interactive entertainment's theoretical potential. If you compare the advent of interactive entertainment to that of the printing press, then it can be argued that all we've done with our printing presses so far is happily churn out millions of fortune cookie slips, blissfully ignorant of the fact that we could be publishing

novels or newspapers and changing the world. If you compare interactive entertainment to oil paints and canvases, the output of the game industry so far amounts to little more than the amusing doodles of the guy sitting next to us in class.

Please understand, I don't claim to have any loftier demands than any other cognitive gamer. And realize that this is no denunciation of videogames, at least the best ones, as a tremendous way to spend a few hours having innocuous fun — but rather a criticism that that's all they are: innocuous fun. My point isn't

that the game industry hasn't achieved much — it has. It's more that it has so much further to go toward becoming an artistic medium every bit as revolutionary as television, the movies, or the written word, and yet so few people in the industry seem to realize this or show a willingness to take the painful, difficult (and yes, possibly, initially unprofitable) steps required.

Under pressure

Besides, there are two other serious reasons why the videogame industry should work to evolve from its current state into the "interactive entertainment" industry it could be. It would be naive to think that progress into potentially expensive and difficult new territories will come about by simple altruism or an innate desire to live up to one's potential. Much as Simba in *The Lion King* had to receive portentous news from home to spur him into accepting his responsibilities as an adult, so the game industry increasingly finds itself coerced into "growing up." First, Senator Joseph Lieberman (interviewed in **NG 28**), and seemingly every other politician in need of a fashionable bandwagon, is campaigning to force the game industry into forsaking violence, its favorite and most profitable subject matter. Second, as videogames become ever bigger and bigger business, more and more pressure is mounting from within to expand videogaming's appeal and marketability beyond the realm of adolescent males.

I've been following the whole "videogames and violence" debate closely for the last five years (if for no better reason than my Mom calls me up every time she reads a new "Videogame Danger!" headline in her local newspaper to ask, "Are you sure you're safe?" Please). Now, while the vast majority of scare stories on TV and in the newspapers that point accusing fingers at videogames can be immediately discarded as sensationalist, under-researched hype, some of them can't. I defy anyone to read the interview with Senator Lieberman in **NG 28** and not come away

wondering if maybe, just maybe, there might be a valid point buried somewhere under all that huffing and puffing. Concerning adults, his argument is strained. But for impressionable kids, well, maybe violent videogames are setting a bad example...

In *Next Generation's* follow-up to the Lieberman interview, printed the next month (**NG 29**), Professor Henry Jenkins (professor and Director of Media Studies at MIT) did much to dismantle the Senator's case against videogames as the cause of real life violence. Professor Jenkins argued that when kids play

violent videogames they are fulfilling the same needs for escapism, role-playing, and, yes, experimentation with violence that they have historically satisfied in the playground. Videogames aren't the cause of violence, but merely a convenient and attractive medium in which violence is explored.

"What videogames provide is a 'virtual play space,'" Jenkins explained. "They provide an environment that kids can enter into, interact with, explore, and do many of the things that they traditionally did in the backyard, the empty

The industry increasingly finds itself coerced into "growing up"

field, or down by the river in Mark Twain's Mississippi." The professor even proposed that, "In 1997 when we scapegoat [videogames], it's just the same thing as when 200 years ago people said that children behaved 'badly' because they were possessed by demons."

Case against videogames dismissed? Not quite. If you read the interview with Professor Jenkins carefully, you'll realize that not quite all is well. "I'm not here to give videogames a completely clean bill of health," he cautions. Although videogames may be being used as a substitute for playground rough and tumble and natural "boyish" brutality, this doesn't necessarily mean that they're up to the job. As **Next**

Generation posed to Professor Jenkins in his interview, an obvious difference between violent situations in videogames and violent situations in real life is that in games, violence is the only option. If in real life a child is confronted by a playground bully he or she can run, wisecrack a way out of trouble, call for help, threaten to tell the bully's teacher or parents, or — ideally, perhaps — become friends with his aggressor.

Pressure is mounting from within to expand videogaming's appeal

The point being that there are many alternatives to fighting, and a kid's handling of these situations will teach valuable lessons about life. In a videogame, however, violence is usually the only option. If videogames are replacing the real world as an environment in which kids grow up, this is surely a serious problem. The professor's response? "That violence is the only option is one of the things that really does bother me about these games." And yet no one in the games industry seems to be in too much of a hurry to acknowledge this as an issue.

Ultimately, a similar conclusion has to be

drawn from the speculation surrounding the physical effects of playing videogames. Experts argue back and forth as to whether or not playing a videogame for hours is any "worse" than watching TV all night. On the one hand, it's often proposed that videogames can enhance hand/eye coordination skills and encourage computer literacy; on the other hand are the issues of repetitive strain injuries, eye damage, and the whole epilepsy scare. At this stage, the only fair assessment is that videogaming is no more physically damaging than reading a book

or watching TV. Except, of course, that this quickly leads anti-videogame campaigners to point out that, "At least if kids were reading a book or watching TV they might learn something!" And they have a point.

So once again, the real problem with videogames isn't so much intrinsic in the medium, it's in the limited scope of the message. Or, it's not the videogame system, it's the games themselves. If we're ever going to be rid of Senator Lieberman & Co.'s criticism, we simply need to offer more meaningful roles and content.

The second big incentive for the videogame industry to expand its horizons is good ol' profit. As more and more games companies compete for a bigger slice of the pie, the pressure mounts to make the pie bigger. Despite what Sega and Sony's marketing departments would have you believe, and despite the considerable migration of PC-based games out of the kids' room into the parents' home office, computer and videogames are still mainly the domain of adolescent males. Game company executives often pace their offices, pondering as to why they can't sell their products to women (50% of their possible market).

Decision makers often forget that it's not a question of more aggressive marketing or even the occasional female-brandishing-large-sword game heroine, but rather that, fundamentally, the types of games that are being churned out over and over again simply don't appeal to women.

And it's not just that "girls don't like videogames." Undoubtedly one of the biggest barriers to the female market is that the vast majority of 1997's videogames are visual manifestations of problems exclusively demanding spatial logic skills. Put more simply: they're about the manipulation of objects within a physical space — not people. The majority of today's videogames can be boiled down to "go left," "go right," "line that up with this," "dodge that projectile," "pick up this," "hit X with Y," "speed up to Z mph," "drop that," "try going underneath," "allocate X many to A and Y many to B," and so on. They all revolve around physical

items in the physical world. And women, generally speaking, don't find these kinds of puzzles interesting. Women would be more inclined to enjoy the challenge of a videogame based on more social, artistic, or emotional puzzles. And hardly any making them.

It doesn't matter whether or not the hero is male or female, or whether his or her motivation in the game is bloodthirsty revenge or maternal love. You can't hide a wolf in sheep's clothing, and even if your game stars the most feminine heroine in a virtual shopping mall, if it relies exclusively on the application of spatial logic skills by the player, you ain't gonna get the gal.

As for expanding the appeal of videogames beyond that of teens, surely the answer is the incorporation of more mature and sophisticated roles for the player to take. And yet cosmetics remain the first priority of developers. A game company's pursuit of better graphics at the cost of research and development into other aspects of game making is often justified by the argument, "Adults require a more realistic looking world before they can 'get into' a game." The theory being that the only reason my Mom isn't willing to spend hours of her free time blasting mindless waves of aliens is because they don't look realistic enough. I'm sorry, but my mother simply isn't interested in blasting aliens — no matter how realistic their blood might ooze. She'd regard the whole experience as shallow and one-dimensional.

Sure, kids generally have livelier imaginations than adults and find it easier to maintain a suspension of disbelief; this lets them relate more easily to primitive images on a computer screen. But this doesn't mean that most adults don't play because the images are too simple for them. Otherwise, how would an adult ever read a book (in which there are no images at all)? Graphical brilliance sells well to the existing videogamers, but does relatively little to spread gaming's appeal to the outside world.

On a structural level (a move away from the testing of spatial logic skills) and a content level (the broadening of gaming's horizons to incorporate a more diverse mix of roles and subject matter), gaming needs to grow. It doesn't matter how good games look. Gaming needs to provide a wealth of interpersonal options if it is to grow in sophistication and make any valid claim of offering a meaningful virtual reality.

OK, but what about Arthur Dent and those cavemen?

Which brings me back to my brief synopsis of *The Restaurant At The End Of The Universe*:

Forgive me if it sounds grand, but I was beginning to worry about the future of interactive entertainment the same way Arthur worried about the future of planet Earth. I looked out and saw a brand new artistic/communicative medium of unprecedented potential. Arthur saw the possibilities for a fresh start offered by a virginal, unspoiled planet. And yet for both of us it was becoming increasingly apparent that the prevalent settlers of the new territories we saw before us were both unworthy and unaware of

I'm sorry, but my mother simply isn't interested in blasting aliens

their momentous role.

While Arthur's cavemen were perilously close to extinction at the hands of the rambunctious Golgafrinchans, so any hope of real interactive entertainment is at severe risk of being trampled to death under legions of second-rate, shoddily produced and heavily marketed, movie tie-in platform games. In which you shoot people. A lot. Much as the Golgafrinchans see no problem with their way of life and therefore no need to change or grow, the same is true of the majority of decision makers in 1997's game industry. Try talking to a mainstream software publisher about the awe-inspiring possibilities of, say, a purely dialogue-based game in which the entire "action" takes place in a courtroom and the player takes on the role of a spunky, young defense attorney, and you'll be met by a blank stare. Or possibly a question as to whether or not the defense attorney has machine guns. And then executives wonder why only teenage boys buy their games. Sure, this defense attorney game may not be possible with today's technology, but maybe

There is more hope for the future than most people realize

that's just because most of today's technology and expertise is geared solely towards producing better and better graphics.

So, in conclusion (and to bring this rather long-winded *The Restaurant At The End Of The Universe* analogy to a close), I'm going to try to help my cause the way Arthur Dent tried to help his: with words. Arthur reached for his Scrabble board, you'll get my column (any observations as to who's getting the best deal can be kept to yourselves, thank you). The idea is that each month, I'll try and dig around and report on what strides forward are being taken. Maybe it'll help,

maybe it won't. Either way, hopefully it should give us all something to think about.

That's enough sizzle — where's the sausage?

OK, so it may seem that so far I've made a lot of criticisms and a lot of "doom-and-gloom" analogies without seeming to offer much hope. But such an interpretation misses what I'm trying to get across. My point is that there's more hope for the future than most people realize! As I said before, it's not a question of how little

interactive entertainment has achieved but of how more there is to accomplish. All this ranting should be taken as a treatise of optimism and encouragement to keep pushing back the limits.

And I've got nothing against videogames as a great way of having fun, either. I'm looking forward to playing Shigeru Miyamoto's or John Romero's next game as much as anyone, it's just that I'd also like the chance to play games with more meaningful content when I'm in the mood. It's just like the movies — stunt-packed Jean-Claude Van Damme action flicks are great fun, but more serious movies such as *Apocalypse Now*, *The Piano*, or, say *Hoop Dreams* offer different emotional experiences that are entertaining and rewarding in different ways. And it's good to have a choice.

Gaming is making progress toward these new experiences all of the time, it's just a question of not looking for it in the usual places. Over the following months, I'll be reporting on enormous strides taken in the world of online gaming, artificial intelligence, computer programs designed to offer the player a meaningful conversation, and enhanced player input (after all, how can you have a conversation with anyone in a game if all you can say is "left," "right," "up," or "down" — unless, of course, it's answering a request for directions). Computer games and videogames have successfully grown from infancy to childhood. Now it's time for them to become adult. Sure, there's bound to be a painful period of adolescence

as we fall more times than we succeed in our quest for more, but the rewards will undoubtedly be worth it.

I'm as excited as hell by gaming's future. The possibilities are endless.

Wanna talk about it?

If you have any comments or feedback, then e-mail Neil at neil@imagine-inc.com or write him at Neil West, Imagine Publishing, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, QA 4115. He'll be including reader Q&A in future columns, so get busy.

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finals

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Why buy a bad game?
 Next Generation
 reviews and rates

the month's new game releases so you don't have to. Our opinion as to each game's merits can be found in the text, but refer to the following ratings as a rough guide to a game's worth (or lack of any worth).

★★★★★ Revolutionary

Brilliantly conceived and flawlessly executed; a new high watermark.

★★★★ Excellent

A high quality and inventive new game. Either a step forward for an existing genre or a successful attempt at creating a new one.

★★★ Good


A solid and competitive example of an established game style.

★★ Average

Perhaps competent — certainly uninspired.

★ Bad

Crucially flawed in design or application.

 Denotes a review of a Japanese product.

Nintendo 64

Dark Rift

Publisher: **Vic Tokai**
 Developer: **Kronos**

One of the first 3D fighters for Nintendo 64, *Dark Rift* was designed by Kronos, responsible for the ultimately disappointing *Criticom* for PlayStation, but it's clear the developers have learned a great deal (and been given more time to complete the project). As it turns out, *Dark Rift* comes with some compelling features but also some obvious problems.

The fighting system is an unapologetic clone of *Tekken*'s multi-combo approach that throws in weapon-based combat for diversity. Players pull off moves in a *Tekken*-style combination of button-tapping and half- or quarter-circle turning, resulting in long chain moves that destroy an unsuspecting opponent. With the right move at the right time, these chains can be broken (in a much more straightforward, less cryptic way than, say, *Killer Instinct*'s combo-breakers), giving an element of depth and style to the game that's entertaining and — depending on the character — relatively easy to pick up.

The control is quick and responsive, working on a 60-frame-per-second engine, but in order to keep that high



Despite some graphical shortcomings and its derivative nature, *Dark Rift* isn't bad at all

frame rate, the developers have had to sacrifice certain Nintendo 64 features, such as anti-aliasing and Z-buffering. This results in a distracting flicker, although, as with *Sega's Fighter's Megamix*, once the action starts you don't notice the graphic shortcomings much. Character design is about as unoriginal as the move system, but nonetheless the lineup boasts a few interesting entries. Standouts among more familiar opponents like Aaron,

Gore, and Scarlet include the hoofed demons *Demonica* and playable-with-a-code boss *Demontron*, light-saber wielding robot *Eve* (who uses actual fencing moves), and the astonishing morphing eye-candy of *Morphix*.

Dark Rift is a solid effort, but its derivative nature keeps it from greatness. Still, it's a far cry from being *Criticom* if it stands head and shoulders above *War Gods* — which makes it, quite literally, the best 3D brawler available for the system. **Hmm.**

Rating: ★★

Human Grand Prix

Publisher: **Human Entertainment**
 Developer: **Human Entertainment**

Human Grand Prix — which will arrive in the West as *F1 Pole Position*, released through *Ubi Soft* — marks the first F1 style racing game for Nintendo 64.

Like its Super NES forebears, *Human GP* isn't strictly a realistic simulation; it adds a number of arcade-like features that round it out for a broader audience. Still, gamers must race the smart race, mastering the controls and carefully thinking out each turn. Throw in a good



The rushed feel of *Human Grand Prix* leaves too many gaps in its gameplay to recommend it

sense of speed, a hearty portion of configurable cars, changeable weather conditions, and more than a dozen real Grand Prix tracks from around the world, and the game begins to look like a serious contender.

Unfortunately, *Human GP* also looks and plays like a rushed-to-market game. The screen has been letter-boxed to reduce it to a smaller size, presumably to keep the frame rate high without the need for fancy program optimization. To

add to the game's troubles, clipping, pop-in (as bad as in the original *Daytona USA* for Saturn), a mediocre soundtrack, and a general blandness in the actual racing put this game in the questionable file. The cars almost all resemble one another, and the backgrounds all look pretty much alike as well.

Perhaps worst of all, it's only a one-player game. That's right, despite the four readily available controller ports, *Human GP* is for only one person. This a game for the starving, desperate Nintendo fan who simply has to have an F1 racing game, quality be damned. If you're not desperate, forget it.

Rating: ★★

War Gods

Publisher: **Midway**
 Developer: **Midway**

Like many Midway titles, *War Gods* originated in the arcade, and while Midway has an arcade legacy few can match in terms of popularity and longevity, one title that will never be remembered as a classic is *War Gods*.

With this port to Nintendo 64, *War Gods* is a better game than it originally was. It's faster — the lackluster speed of the arcade version being one of its sorest



War Gods for N64 has been retooled and retweaked, but that still doesn't make it good

points — and it looks better, thanks to Nintendo 64's anti-aliasing. Midway also brought in the arcade programmers to further tune and tweak the bosses, so they aren't as amazingly tough as they were in the arcade and can actually be defeated. Finally, combos and 3D moves, projectiles, and movement are all more intuitive now that players can activate them using the N64 controller.

But the sad thing is, despite all the extra effort that went into it, *War Gods* for

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Nintendo 64 still isn't any more fun than it was originally. It probably should have been left where it was and forgotten. The only points of interest are the easy-to-learn *Mortal Kombat*-style fighting system and a batch of horrific fatalities that are good for a chuckle the first time.

Otherwise, the character designs are unoriginal and pathetic (Kabuki Jo says it all), the animation is jerky and stiff, and nearly every element in the game is obvious and contrived. Waiting for *Mortal Kombat 4* was just made a lot easier.

Rating: ★

Nintendo 64

Smashing

A unique title that shows what N64 games should be



Blast Corps perfectly captures the feeling of playing with Tonka trucks in a sandbox



Blast Corps
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Rare



Nintendo's breathless insistence that quality must prevail over quantity has, until now, been at best half true: a slow trickle of mediocre games, occasionally enhanced by something actually exciting, such as *Wave Race*. Well, *Blast Corps* gives another shot in the arm to an otherwise flat-lined catalog of misery. With over three years of concept and development behind it, *Blast Corps* is exactly as good — and different — as it should be.

The premise is at least as original as the presentation. Players lead a team of elite demolition experts as they attempt to clear a path for a runaway nuclear missile truck. This is accomplished by simply smashing every building in sight, using a wide array of destructive vehicles, which range from the predictable bulldozer to a missile-firing motorcycle. Strategic mayhem ensues, and a fine time is had by all.

Clearing the path is usually tougher than it first appears. Players must switch vehicles, solve puzzles, and explore each level fully. Graphically, the unique gameplay is enhanced by rock-solid polygons, the by now familiar Nintendo 64 anti-aliasing, and some rather pretty lighting effects. This was also supposed to be one of the first games to support the N64 "Rumble Pak," although upon inspection, no such support exists. No points off for this, but it is a mild disappointment, mentioned only because the inclusion of solenoid-induced vibration could have only added to the destructive atmosphere.

Forget the plot and enjoy what is effectively every Tonka fantasy brought vividly and explosively to life. Huge levels, hidden vehicles, and bonus sections add to the longevity and variety. *Blast Corps* is one of the few Nintendo 64 games that justifies its exorbitant price tag.

Rating: ★★★★★

PlayStation

BallBlazer Champions

Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: Factor 5

Originally released for the Atari 400/800, *BallBlazer* set a new high watermark for graphics and gameplay. *BallBlazer Champions* builds on the original game's future sport premise, but presents it in a next-generation package that takes full advantage of PlayStation's hardware capabilities.

Part soccer, part *Rollerball*, and a lot of *BattleSport*, *BallBlazer Champions* takes place on multiple planets, where aliens have chosen to compete in sport, rather than kill each other in wars. The game consists of two Rotofoils (small, like rockets) on a playing field, each trying to shoot a Plasmorb ball into their opponent's goal. Your Rotofoil is equipped with weapons, and some can even fly for short amounts of time. Power-ups are littered across the field to make you faster and more deadly.

The gameplay, as one would expect, can be fairly fast. Stealing the Plasmorb away from your opponent and keeping it isn't child's play, and quite a bit of back-and-forth precedes any scoring. The stadiums could be a little smaller, as you can find yourself alone at one end too often. Overall, though, the action is well-balanced.



BallBlazer Champions looks good, but a lack of depth means it plays best as a two-player game

Graphically, *BallBlazer Champions* is just gorgeous. The level of detail is superb, with transparent lighting effects on the Plasmorb and pulsating goals fully exploiting the system's hardware strengths.

Control of the Rotofoils is intuitive, an excellent feature of which is the Roto-snap, or auto-turn button, which automatically points you in the direction of the ball or goal, depending on your current position.

LucasArts has done a fine job with *BallBlazer Champions* and has actually made a future sport game work, something which few seem to have been able to do — perhaps its derivative nature is not a bad thing here. A good one-player game, but even better with two players.

Rating: ★★

Battlestations

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Electronic Arts

Battlestations is essentially a 32-bit upgrade to the Intellivision classic *Sea Battle*, in which players deploy and maneuver a fleet of eight unique ships, ranging from a submarine to an aircraft carrier to a battleship against a seaborne enemy. Once opposing ships are in range, the game switches to an arcade-style battle. This attempt at combining war strategy and arcade action makes for a strong two-player game. Trouble is, the one-player campaign comes up short in both strategic depth and action.

Each ship is equipped with a different array of weapons and has its own speed and strengths, leading to a number of varied strategies. The arcade element means that no two battles will ever play out quite the same. Against the computer, the player engages in several campaigns ranging from attacking bases to stopping convoys to rescuing hostages. The key is to strategically deploy the proper ships, then win the one-on-one battles. Ultimately though, the ships aren't nearly different enough, leaving each battle as generic as the last.

The combination of strategy and action in *Battlestations* brings a certain thrill to warring against another human



Despite its strategic elements, Battlestations' head-to-head battles turn into button mashing

opponent, and makes it an enjoyable two-player game. Given that most action-strategy hybrids for consoles — even, disappointingly, *Command & Conquer* — are strictly one-player affairs, the game deserves some small success, if only to goad publishers into releasing more multiplayer, real-time strategy titles into the console market. As much fun as it can be, however, *Battlestations*'s depth just doesn't measure up to even its low-res ancestor over the long haul.

Rating: ★★

Grand Slam

Publisher: Virgin
Developer: Burst

One of several baseball titles that missed last season, *Grand Slam* is finally ready

PlayStation

Utterly Striking



Square brings the world the first 3D fighting sim — and things will never be the same



Bushido Blade offers the most realistic weapons-based combat of any fighting game — years of skill building at traditional fighting games means little here, a frightening prospect for some gamers

Bushido Blade

Publisher: Sony

Developer: Square/Light Weight

Every few years a game is released that sets a new high watermark for an existing genre. *Mario 64* did it for platform games, *WipeOut* did it for racing games, and now *Bushido Blade* has done it for 3D fighting games.

Bushido Blade is a weapons-based fighter, but its similarity to games such as *Soul Blade* ends there. To begin with, the combat system emphasizes realism to the point at which one could almost term it a fighting sim. There's no health bar, so one good slice to the head or torso and the match is over. Cuts to the leg cause foes to crawl around and hack from the ground, and wounding their striking arm makes them run helplessly away. There are also no "rings" or barriers in *Bushido Blade*, which enables free reign of each multi-leveled combat area.

The six characters are arranged on a scale of strength by speed, and there is a choice of six weapons, from fencing sabers, to katanas, to huge Conan-style broadswords. Any character can use any weapon, and the fighting style depends, realistically, on the weapon, not the character. The control is also unique and realistic: players choose a stance, then launch attacks out of those stances. Duels are fast, depending more on feints and a knowledge of what each weapon can do than stringing together combos. Matches often last less than a few seconds.

The attention to detail in *Bushido Blade* is nothing short of brilliant. Fighters leave footprints in the sand and snow, and when a character dies in the water, their clothing floats upwards and waves with the moving water. For all its innovations and advancements, though, *Bushido Blade* does suffer from some minor flaws. The dynamic

panning camera can get stuck behind trees and objects, obscuring the action, and the control could benefit from being more responsive. Also, with only six characters and the swiftness with which rounds can end, the one-player game can be fairly short.

Given that Square has chosen to take a much more realistic approach to blade combat than most fighters, it could be argued that *Bushido Blade* is the kind of game you either love or hate. However, while it may not offer the arcade-style button mashing or twenty hit combos of other 3D brawlers, it does offer the closest you can get to the real thing without actually getting cut.

Rating: ★★★★★



The "taunts" of the story mode aren't so much taunts at all, but are more accurately heartbreaking scenes of regret and honor

for release after three years in development. Players will immediately notice the simplistic, dull graphics, reminiscent of 16-bit baseball, but the developers focused on giving players more control than they've had before and recreating the gameplay of the sport, not on making it pretty.

The key new features are a pitching and power meter that operate exactly like a swing meter in golf games. By hitting the meter in different places, the pitch speed and accuracy changes, meaning the player has to concentrate on every pitch. This definitely adds a dimension of control which videogame baseball has lacked.

Once up at the plate, several different ways of hitting exist. Players can simply time swings as in most hardball games, use a batting cursor to pinpoint the swing, or use the batting cursor and a power meter. All these methods work, but controlling the power meter and the cursor and timing the incoming ball are just too difficult.

The biggest problem with *Grand Slam*, however, is the pace. Even with the simple graphics, players still have to wait forever between each batter, which slows the game to a crawl and makes playing through a season very painful.

The developers should be commended on trying to reinvent



Compared to other PS-X baseball games, the simplistic sprites of Grand Slam are embarrassing

baseball gameplay, but the changes can't yet compete with the classic method. *Grand Slam* has all the features and options in place, but ultimately can't make up for substandard graphics and slow pace. Maybe next season.

Rating: ★★

MechWarrior 2

Publisher: Activision

Developer: Quantum Factory

After a slew of successful PC titles set in the *MechWarrior* universe and a couple of interesting, if ultimately disappointing, games for 16-bit consoles, Activision finally releases a console version that does the series justice.

MechWarrior 2 for PlayStation is a faithful recreation of the PC title, although a few modifications were made with the arcade-oriented console owner in mind. The combat arenas have been



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rating



MechWarrior 2 successfully turns a good PC 'mech sim into a solid, arcade-style console game

condensed to prevent unnecessary wandering around, and a non-campaign mode has been included for some quick, no frills fighting. The full 32 original PC campaign missions are included, as well as 16 new ones, all of which cover a wide variety of objectives — everything from defending repair vehicles to taking out enemy bases.

The control in *MechWarrior 2* is exceptional and is perhaps its best feature. The mechs respond intuitively, like lumbering mechanical combat units would. Some functions, like weapons, have been grouped on the same button to save space, but simple toggling takes care of the relatively small inconvenience. The graphics, while somewhat understated in the interest of speed, still look just fine, and basic textures round out the sparse landscapes.

MechWarrior 2 may not break any new boundaries, but it does offer the rock-solid mech combat that consoles have deserved all along.

Rating: ★★★★★

OverBlood

Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **Riverhill Soft**

Resident Evil undoubtedly set itself up as the pinnacle of console graphic adventure games, but there have been a few worthy contenders as of late — most notably *Fade To Black*. However, for every *Resident Evil*, there seem to be a dozen or so *City Of Lost Children*. Not as slow as *Lost Children*, but nowhere near as fun as *Resident Evil*, *OverBlood* has managed to wedge itself somewhere in-between.



The great graphics don't make up for OverBlood's slow pace and minimal puzzles

The main character, Raz Karcy, awakens from a cryogenic state and finds he has no memory. Trapped on a lower level of an underground base, Raz must work his way to the upper levels to discover who he is and solve a host of other dilemmas.

This is a basic puzzle-based adventure with all the switch flipping and problem solving you'd expect from the genre. To their credit, the developers have included some interesting game twists, namely the inclusion of two more controllable characters. It is necessary to switch back and forth between characters to perform specific tasks, and this adds an extra strategy element to an otherwise typical problem solving scheme.

The game's biggest problem, however, is that the puzzles are too few and far between. Most of the game is spent walking down long, barren

corridors and passing through doors (every door opened is shown in a cut scene that can't be skipped through and, of course, requires load time). The action sequences, although welcome after all the walking, are too brief to even merit a mention.

Despite the excellent graphics, the game just can't hold a player's interest. *OverBlood* could've used a little more action and a lot less wandering around.

Rating: ★★

Tail of the Sun

Publisher: **SCEA**
Developer: **ArtDink**

This game is quite simple — you're a caveman, and you want to kill as many mastodons as it takes to build a tower of tusks to the tail of the sun. Along the

way, you'll find other things to kill and eat (from monkeys to sabre-tooth tigers), secret idols that give you power-ups, as well as cave people of the opposite sex.

Most of the game is spent running around a massive 3D landscape (which is dotted with surprises, like Stonehenge), and while the graphics are



Tail of the Sun is a unique title that deserves a serious look

PlayStation

Homer

Triple Play '98

Publisher: **EA Sports**
Developer: **EA Canada**

Continuing its current trend, EA has taken another one of its classic sports series into the third dimension. Previous efforts like *NBA Live*, *IFA*, and *NHL '97* have had mixed results, with some impressive graphics, a poor frame rate, and lesser gameplay. However, *Triple Play '98* is a different story.

The 3D players and ballparks are among the smoothest ever created, and the detailed, uniform textures are unbelievably realistic. Players have uniforms complete with name and number on the back, plus there are different body sizes and batting stances depending on who the player is. Underneath the graphical overhaul is the same exact game as last season, with some minor improvements in nearly every area. The hitting still gives the player total control over whether to hit the ball in the air, on the ground, to the opposite field, or down the line. This year the players don't have to open or close their stance, which basically gave away the direction of the hit. On the mound a few minor changes have been made, such as the ability to throw the ball up or down in the strike



The polygonal players are still a little chunky looking, but the silky smooth animations and crisp textures give the game a sharp look



EA Sports reminds its fans why it's still a force to be reckoned



You can now climb the wall to save a home run; too bad they didn't throw in the ability to control the fans and have them take away dingers like in the playoffs

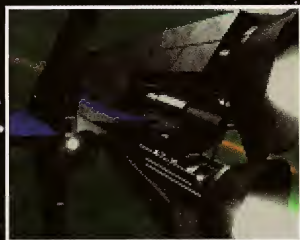
zone. A new invisible pitching "meter" has to be timed similar to a jump shot in a basketball game to achieve maximum power and effectiveness. The depth of options, stats, and features is still unsurpassed, and new features like varying attendance at games adds even more incentive to the season mode.

Buck Martinez has joined Jim Hughson in the announcer booth to create the first two-man play-by-play in videogame history. Buck's comments add a nice touch of realism, but there are definitely times when you wish he would just shut up (of course, that can be said of announcers in real baseball as well).

The game still has some flaws with the AI, a slow frame-rate, and too much delay between batters, but in the end there is no baseball game on PlayStation that can even come close to *Triple Play* in graphics or playability.

Rating: ★★★★★

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very simple, the game is incredibly fun to watch and to play.

The premise is slightly ludicrous (you can build a tower to the sun!), but there are some deep elements to the game—you play a single individual who represents a whole tribe, so the survival of dozens of people depends on you—as well as tons of humor.

There's nothing like seeing your whole tribe dance around when you bring back meat to your village.

Like most ArDink titles, the game doesn't fit neatly into any one genre but still gives gamers most everything they want—challenge, tension, humor, and fun—in a way that hasn't been done before. Put simply, *Tail of the Sun* is another successful effort of the part of Sony to increase the depth of PlayStation's library. Recommended.

Rating: ★★★★★

Wing Commander IV: The Price of Freedom

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Origin

Wing Commander IV represents something of an anomaly. Not quite all game, but not just a passive movie, it sits uncomfortably between the two—a last gasp of the failed FMV subgenre.

Starting a host of recognizable, if B-star actors (including Mark Hamill of *Batman* fame and Tom Wilson, *Back to the*



Mark Hamill does well with the starring role in *Wing Commander IV*

Future's Bliff, *Wing Commander IV* picks up where the third left off. "Variac" (Wilson) is sent to a desert planet to bring the hero of the series, Col. William Blair (Hamill), back to the Confederation to combat a rebel uprising.

Most of the four disc "game" is comprised of extended FMV sequences, with some interaction in the way of deciding what Blair should do next, or choosing his conversation topics. The video quality is excellent for PlayStation, and the load time, often a problem in FMV-based games, has been kept to a minimum. The acting is often overdone, but rarely is it downright bad.

FMV or no however, *Wing Commander IV* really falls apart when you get to the actual "game," a sub-Star Raiders cockpit shooter. Everything about it is horrible. The graphics are low-res

and blocky, and the control is so sluggish it's practically impossible to hit anything. There's no excuse for this: *Wool* for 300 (and later PlayStation), despite the heavy FMV, was at least enjoyable when you got to the combat sequences. There's no telling what happened between this engine and the last, but the designers blew it. Once you've waded through ten minutes of poor "Babylon 5" outtakes, you expect something a little more rewarding. Hopefully *Wing Commander IV* will herald the end of the FMV era.

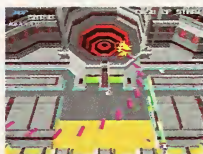
Rating: ★★

Xevious 3D/G+

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco

There's no denying the love most gamers have for the original *Xevious*. Its groundbreaking prerendered sprites and solid gameplay went unsurpassed for many years. And although the retrogaming craze is getting a little tired, just the idea of a *Xevious* in 3D is enough to get us all hot and bothered.

While not exactly 3D in the strictest sense, *Xevious 3D/G+* (which also includes the original *Xevious*, *Super Xevious*, and *Xevious Arrangement* on the same disc) does bring the tried-and-true shooter into the polygonal age. The graphics are just breathtaking, and must be seen to be believed. Heavily textured backgrounds and enemies have been



The graphics in *Xevious* are amazing, but the slow down due to too prevalent to ignore

avoided in favor of flat-shaded ones, giving it a unique, almost retro feel.

Namco has managed to maintain not only the look but the solid feel of the original, and this is what makes *Xevious 3D/G+* so wonderful. The full roster of attacking air and ground ships are all present and accounted for, including quite a few new ones. The trademark *Xevious* sound effects are used to great effect, and even the music, albeit in a new techno format, is exceptional.

However, the game is not without its faults. Whenever the screen gets crowded (which is often) there's terrible slowdown. Plus, with five ground levels (and two in space), the game's just too short, and can be finished in about an hour. This is a real shame, because while it lasts, it's a lot of fun.

Rating: ★★

Saturn

Zap: Snowboarding Trix

Publisher: TV Tokyo
Developer: TV Tokyo/
Pony Canyon

Although the snowboarding game is fairly new, it's surprising to see one of the strongest titles in this growing genre come from TV Tokyo, a company better known for anime and video. *Zap: Snowboarding Trix* may have begun as a trendy cash-in product, but it ends up as an adrenaline-pumping shredfest.



Zap: Snowboarding Trix jumps on the boarding bandwagon, but emerges as a surprising hit

From the first loading screen to the instant replay, the game looks like ESPN produced by MTV. The racers sport the stereotypical knit caps, baggy clothing, and hip sunglasses that conform to a Japanese vision of America's Generation X. The music also does a passable rendition of a bad dance mix, which means *Trix* plays best with the volume way, way down.

The designers manage to overcome some graphical flaws with excellent play mechanics. The control is highly responsive, letting players concentrate on racing the course rather than reacting to it. Well-balanced racers fit their own individual playing styles, and course design is such that it's possible to win with any of them, on timed or stunt races, as each track is paced, mixing the right amount of curves, straight-aways, and obstacles necessary to keep players sweating across the finish line. You've gotta work hard to win, but it's worth it.

With only three competitive courses and one freestyle course, there may not be enough to keep the master gamer involved. However, compared to its competition, *Cool Boarders*, *Trix* breezes by as a faster, more exciting experience.

Rating: ★★

Scorcher

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Scavenger

A racing game described as a little bit *WipeOut* and little bit *Marble Madness*, *Scorcher* puts the player in the

driver's seat of a racing sphere, competing for a six-track championship. Although the competition is ostensibly three different racers, each one guided by a simple directive to speed, to avoid players, or to bully them out of the way, it becomes clear that they're nothing more than course obstacles, which makes it just a little less appealing.

The courses almost make up for it. Some of the most attractive graphics ever to grace Saturn are seen here, sporting some fine scenery that immerses players in that techno-



Scavenger's Scorcher shows promise, but in the end never quite lives up to it

Apocalyptic feel so popular these days. Each course requires you to master the vehicle, including its jumping and turbo boost capabilities.

Unfortunately, *Scavenger* got carried away with the game design and created an imbalance in the gameplay. While the first two tracks are an exciting introduction into the *Scorcher* ball racer's unique properties, the learning curve goes up exponentially by the third. Playtime is over, and mastering the vehicle becomes more important than the race. Worse, players who fall down a pit, for example, will find themselves placed back on the track right in front of the same pit, instead of beyond it. A combination of bad course placement and overly demanding courses builds a wall of frustration that few gamers will want to climb.

Scorcher is a good game, with many things going for it, but *Scavenger's* preoccupation with making it look cool rather than play great makes it a sad epitaph for the once-promising company.

Rating: ★★

Gundam Gaiden II

Publisher: Bandai
Developer: Bandai

Bandai is obviously more interested in making money off the *Gundam* license than designing a good game, but it's nice to see that they made an honest effort to improve *Gundam Gaiden II* over its predecessor. Even better, they succeeded.

Bandai has used the same graphics engine from the first *Gundam Gaiden*,

rating

complete with flaws — still the same flat terrain, the close horizon, and pop-up. However, at least the engine was pretty fast and had a good frame rate. The designers realized this, and they've radically increased the number of mech opponents and fire support units. Expect some pretty intense-looking Zion mobile suits coming your way.

This sequel continues the story arc introduced with the original — since you've risen in the ranks, so have your responsibilities. Mission types have expanded from destroy or protect missions to include escorts, albeit simple ones. *MechWarrior 2* may do a better job

of mission design, but *Gundam* combat is much more intense. Better enemy AI makes sure you don't just twiddle your thumbs, while level design has also changed to include more realistic defenses. Even on easy mode, this game mays you plan ahead.

Gundam *Golden II* is more an expansion pack rather than a separate game, and it should be considered as such. In that light, the game's slight graphical improvement but expanded mission goals and AI make it a welcome, if not fantastic, addition to the Saturn game library.

Rating: ★★★

PC

Air Warrior II

Publisher: **Interactive Magic**
Developer: **Interactive Magic**

Air Warrior has maintained its status as one of the best online World War II flight simulators, second only to *WarBirds*.

With *Air Warrior II*, Interactive Magic has managed to give WWII pilots even more to rejoice over.

Aimed mostly at players seeking online entertainment, *AWII* excels, offering the chance for dozens of pilots,

from all over the globe, to test their mettle against each other. Anyone who has ever been online in the U.S., bleary-eyed in the wee hours of the morning only to see a wave of Zeros come diving out of the sun because fans are just getting off work in Japan, knows what a classic online experience it can really be. This update comes equipped with several campaigns and missions in several theaters of operations. The flight interface has been vastly improved, and the game is remarkably simple to get into. The graphics, on the other hand, lack detail — the landscapes are drab, and even changing the resolution to 800-by-600 or 1024-by-768 doesn't help.

However, the game also offers its time off-line (a nice cost savings) with

PC

Super Freak



No generic sci-fi setting here; *Interstate '76* roars through the deserts of the U.S. Southwest

Interstate '76

Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Activision**

The great muscle cars of the '60s and '70s go head to head, armed with machine guns, rocket launchers, and guided missiles in *Interstate '76*, Activision's bold new shoot-'em-up driving game. No dull, generic sci-fi setting here, this is quintessential Americana: a full-blown, hard-driving '70s nostalgia trip, replete with TV-style car chases, bell-bottoms, and an outrageous, dead-on funk soundtrack.

Put together by the *MechWarrior 2* team (essentially using the *MechWarrior 2* engine), the game has just the right blend of realistic car physics and arcade damage to create a great balance of driving, shooting and blowing things up. Players drive through a series of progressively more difficult missions as they uncover the villainy behind the oil crisis in this alternate universe — an America that might have been, a country deprived of gasoline and descending into anarchy, prompting auto-vigilantes to take to the highways in defense of the common man.

By now everyone's heard how well the cut scenes are blended into the game, and this adds tremendously to the unique and imaginative storyline. Larger-than-life characters like Groove Champion, Taurus, and Antonio Malchio are

Activision's new spin on combat cars goes where no game has gone before: the '70s

familiar archetypes from countless '70s action movies and Quinn Martin TV shows, and they're a lot of fun to see again — afros, sideburns, live-ass dialog, and all.

Good news for multiplayer fans too: the game plays over TCP/IP connections right out of the box. By logging onto Activision's free Internet server, you'll be able to jump into a game any time for deathmatches or team play.

On the downside, a choppy frame rate is a problem on slower machines — at least a P133 is needed for maximum enjoyment. Also, Direct3D support is lacking, and will have to wait for a patch, as will versions written for specific 3D accelerators. The selection of classic '70s ponycars are instantly recognizable, but since Activision lacks licenses to the actual names, they're called things like "Palamino" (it's not a Mustang, really), which shaves just a hair off the carefully built atmosphere. Last, a custom paint shop to give your car its own identity when playing on the Net should have been a no-brainer, but no such feature exists.

However, none of the minor annoyances detract much at all from the game's overall impact. *Interstate '76* easily lives up to the hype — it really is "the funkiest PC game ever."

Rating: ★★★★★



If Quentin Tarantino made a computer game, it would probably look a lot like this



The graphics may not look like much at first, but *Air Warrior II* still improves on the original

over 300 nicely varied solo player missions. *AWII* is a must for WWII flight enthusiasts and an excellent choice for anyone looking for a great online multiplayer game.

Rating: ★★★★★

Fable

Publisher: **Sir-tech**
Developer: **Sir-tech**

It's hard to find really good graphic adventures nowadays, so if you're in the market for one, look no further than *Fable*. With excellent voice acting and remarkably crisp and beautifully textured graphics, this should please most graphic adventure fans.

The story involves spiritual beings, an attempted coup of rightful rulers, and enough evil of the game worth playing. You proceed through the game using the mouse to perform the usual actions — pick up item, drop item, use item on object, and so on. The characters are humorous and will quite often make fun of the cliché roles they fulfill in the story — the distinctly British humor that pervades the entire game makes itself known right from the beginning.

The atmosphere, fun storyline, and overall polish of the game help make up for the rather traditional puzzles. The interface doesn't break any new boundaries, and neither does the

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Fable doesn't break any new ground, but it makes a fine addition to any collection

branching-tree dialog structure. However, it's a fine addition to a long line of traditional games, reminiscent of Sierra's *King's Quest* games, and certainly worth a look for any adventure fan.

Rating: ★★★

The Last Express

Publisher: **Broderbund**
Developer: **Smoking Car Productions**

In his attempt to stretch the graphic adventure a bit beyond its sci-fi and fantasy glut, designer Jordan (*Prince of Persia*) Mechner has created *The Last Express*, which unfolds in the corridors and staterooms of the famed Orient Express as it rolls across Europe on the eve of WWI. The player's character, Robert Cath, a freelance secret agent, gets on board in Paris at the behest of a friend (by leaping onto the speeding train from a motorcycle, naturally), only to find his friend dead in his compartment. What at first appears to be a murder mystery quickly deepens into a sprawling plot

involving gun running and semi-mythical artifacts from Russian folklore.

The game's design perfectly captures the location and period, from the art-nouveau architecture to the international passengers' opposing political views. The story is well written, characters are nicely fleshed out, the voice acting is mostly very good, and even subplots often pull the player into following characters around just to see what they're up to. The train's relentless movement adds an element of tension, because if players don't solve each growing part of the mystery in time, they lose the interface includes a handy clock, so players can "rewind" events back to when they believe they missed something.

Unfortunately, *Last Express* is still



For a different (if still kinda the same) sort of graphic adventure, check out *The Last Express*

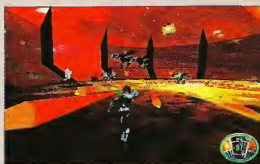
mostly a standard point-and-click graphic adventure. Players move from still screen to still screen, and the characters are barely animated — made with a mixture of rotoscoping for walking sequences and dissolves

PC

Killer

MDK

Publisher: **Playmates**
Developer: **Shiny**



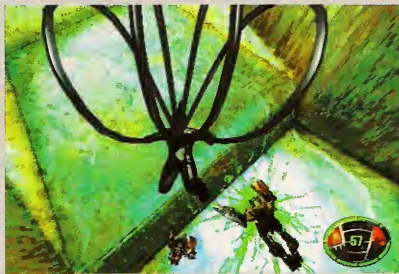
Part *Blade Runner*, part *Tomb Raider*, part *Robotron*, MDK carves its own niche and succeeds on almost every level

The first PC title from console kings Shiny Entertainment, MDK is a superb blend of arcade-style gameplay with the PC's high-res display. The story involves an evil alien race that unleashes giant mobile mining cities that crush whole Earth cities beneath them while looting the planet's natural resources. As usual, the fate of mankind rests with one man, Kurt, equipped with a bullet-repellent attack suit developed by a brilliant scientist.

The graphics deserve special mention, with extremely beautiful environments. Each of the six mining cities has ten huge sub-sections, making a total of 60 levels. These vary in design, but the majority have a distinctly dark and mysterious atmosphere. Shiny should also be commended for remembering that not everyone owns a 3D accelerator — even on entry-level Pentiums, MDK looks great and moves smoothly.

Gameplay is, for the most part, spot-on and imbued with the humor and style that are Shiny's hallmark. Innovative touches like the ribbon-chute

Developer Shiny takes a break from *Earthworm Jim* sequels



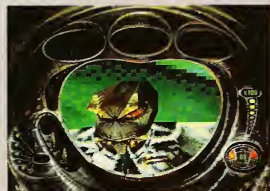
and sniper mode give the third-person shooter a shot in the arm. There simply aren't many moments that rival the sensation of floating down on unsuspecting enemies and shredding them. Sniper mode enables the player to zoom in from extreme distances and pick off the head of an enemy. Overall,

gameplay strikes a fine balance between stealthy infiltration and frenetic firefight.

Still, MDK sometimes comes up short in subtle ways. Shiny has tried to incorporate 2D gameplay elements within expansive 3D environments, but in doing so it had to limit the player's freedom. Although the playfield often has branches and larger areas to roam around in, too often it feels like a darker version of *Crash*.

Bandicoot, with the player given only a single, narrow path. While never glaring, it is enough to downgrade the title from revolutionary to merely excellent. Which still means that MDK is a game that no self-respecting gamer will want to miss.

Rating: ★★★★★



Sniper mode is pretty unique, used for picking off bad guys from a long ways away

rating

between static poses during conversations. The pace is kind of slow, and there are a few illogical roadblocks (only some windows can be opened, for example). The real-time aspect also means a fair amount of going back and watching the same events over and over, although the puzzles in themselves aren't that difficult.

Enjoyment of *The Last Express* depends mostly on one's appreciation for the story and one's acceptance of the standard mechanics. As an attempt at something different, however, we liked it.

Rating: ★★★

Magic: The Gathering

Publisher: **Spectrum HoloByte**
Developer: **MicroProse**

If you've ever played *Wizards of the Coast's Magic: The Gathering* card game, you know exactly what it's all about—strategy, tactics, and a bit of luck. Two sorcerers damage one another by casting various spells designed to weaken the opponent. The card game swept the nation, and MicroProse's computerized version, designed by *Civilization's* Sid Meier, does a faithful job of bringing that card game to the PC but lacks some key elements.

First and foremost, the game has no multiplayer support. Although the impressive computer AI contains occasional surprises, the card game revolves around the social interaction between players; its absence in the PC version is inexcusable. MicroProse plans release a multiplayer patch (or perhaps add-on disc) by the end of the year, but the game should simply never have been released without it in the first place.

In the mean time, the computer AI will give players a run for their money. The duel portion of the game is well laid out, although (oddly for a game that's essentially just a series of 2D windows) sometimes the computer slows down

when presented with a lot of decisions. The rounds of card games are broken up by the "adventure" portion, which serves little purpose other than to provide new chances to challenge the computer in a duel. The story is threadbare, but at least it provides a bit of variety from just playing the computer in a straight series of about a thousand duels.

The lack of multiplayer and oddly high system requirements will keep *Magic: The Gathering* from becoming a gaming classic or even one that fans of the genre will want. In the end, whether you're a fan of the card game or not, there are only two words to describe this release, and they're both "mediocre."

Rating: ★★

Pod

Publisher: **Ubi Soft**
Developer: **Ubi Soft**

With *MMX* selling like hotcakes, it's good to see the technology in action. If you have an *MMX* machine (especially one with a 3D accelerator), *Pod* is a fantastic ride, with high-color graphics at high resolution and a steady, high frame rate. It could very well be the prettiest racing game you can buy right now. However, take away the gloss and the *MMX* boost, and it loses some of its charm.

The cars are hard to control—it's really difficult to feel any sort of gradual analog control with a joystick; instead, it feels more like digital all-on or all-off steering, which means a lot of crashing into walls at first. Even though the frame rate is fast, the cars just don't feel fast. The speedometer may say 150 miles an hour, but it feels more like you're going about 40 or 50.

Although not fully operational at press time, Ubi Soft also has an Internet interface built into the game that will let players compare high scores with others all around the world, download new tracks, and set up multiplayer games. It

PC

Smokin'

The first motorcycle game for PC is better than anyone could have hoped

Moto Racer GP

Publisher: **BMG**
Developer: **Delphine Studios**

Every once in a while a game redefines its genre, making use of new technologies to expand the horizons of level design and gameplay—and to be just plain fun. Delphine's *Moto Racer GP* is one of those games.

Very simply, *Moto Racer GP* is an extremely well-designed motorcycle racing game with both motocross and road bike racing elements. What sets the game apart from other racing titles on the PC—other than being the only motorcycle game available for PC—is its amazingly smooth frame rate, high polygon count, excellent use of Direct3D, multiplayer options, and excellent control.

This is the first game we've seen use Microsoft's Direct 3D API and actually look good, which leads us to believe the API might not be as useless as many developers believe. For those lucky enough to have a 3D accelerator that supports Direct3D, the frame rate is extremely high, regardless of detail settings. Pop-in is a slight problem on some of the tracks, but the constantly changing elevation and tight turns in most of the track designs make it largely unnoticeable. Players have a choice of three camera positions ranging from an extreme third-person perspective to an on-the-bike position which provides an excellent sensation of speed.

The tracks themselves consist of both off-road motocross and grand-prize style races, each using a different class of bike. Players have the option of using any one of a number of different models of bike in both classes, each of which has its own distinct balance of acceleration, grip, and top speed.

Although the AI for computer-controlled bikers isn't very impressive, the bikers do have the tendency to get in your way when you are least prepared to deal with it. Turns must be prepared for by setting your bike to lean in the appropriate direction when entering the turn. If an opposing bike happens to get in your path as you are setting up for the turn, the results can be a loss of time or road rash as your rider skids across the road.

The multiplayer options provide support for LAN, null modem, and TCP/IP, which adds greatly to potential replay value. As with most TCP/IP racing titles, the quality of your connection contributes greatly to the quality of your game, but the execution is as good as we've seen.

Moto Racer GP fills the vacant niche of the PC motorcycle racing genre admirably. With luck, more titles will use Direct 3D as well as this one does.

Rating: ★★★★★



A joy to control and fast, fast, fast, *Moto Racer GP* delivers



Magic: The Gathering emulates the mechanics of the card game well enough, but with no multiplayer options, it's nearly useless



With its multiplayer options and excellent use of D3D, the only motorcycle game for PC is one of the best such games ever

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rating



Pod is a visually stunning arcade racer, but somewhat lacking in control and playability

looks rather like battle.net, but you can download new tracks. In a game this visually stunning, more is certainly better.
Rating: ★★★

Star Command Revolution

Publisher: **GT Interactive**
Developer: **Metropolis**

Ever since the success of *Command & Conquer* and *WarCraft II*, a host of companies have been jumping onto the real-time strategy bandwagon. Some have been rather obvious clones (such as *KKND*), while others have broken new ground (like *Close Combat*). *Star Command Revolution*, from GT Interactive, has some new elements, but for the most part it's same old same old.

The campaign mode is non-linear, which is refreshing, and there are four different races players can choose from. Most of the units for each race, however, are pretty similar, and building up four different bases, one for each race, becomes something of a chore. Every unit has four different traits—



Star Command Revolution is essentially Warcraft in space, except it's not good

control, engines, shields, and tech.

The map of space is 2D, with various asteroids and nebulae forming barriers to movement, serving the same purpose as the trees and mountains in *WarCraft* and *C&C*. There are five different resources, and each race makes use of its own unique resource, while all groups use one called Solinite—taking control of this mineral is the main strategic goal of the game.

Other than general lack of originality, one of the most annoying problems is a lack of a save-game feature. Rather than letting you save at any point along the

campaign, the game has only one save slot per campaign, and it will auto-save only between battles. This adds an unnecessary and arbitrary difficulty that will leave many players frustrated. They may say limitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but this is just an insult.

Rating: ★★

Test Drive Off Road

Publisher: **Accolade**
Developer: **Accolade**

The most important aspect of any arcade racing game is control. It doesn't matter how pretty the tracks are, what kind of cars you race, or what the landscape looks like—if you can't keep the car exactly where you want it, especially after hours of practice, it's not worth playing. And that's the problem with *Accolade's Test Drive Off Road*. It's difficult to keep the car exactly where you want it to be, and the physics of the track are so far off that it doesn't even feel like you're racing as much as



Even if pretty pictures made a great game, Test Drive Off Road would still only be mediocre

haphazardly running over obstacles strewn in your path.

The graphics aren't much to look at, and even running in high-res doesn't yield much beauty. The game does support LAN or modem/serial connections for multiplayer action, but considering the lack of any real play control and the rather underwhelming look of the whole product, it's unlikely you'll find someone who's stop playing *Interstate '76* long enough to give you a decent race. All in all, *TDOR* doesn't muster up to the competition. Not by a long shot.

Rating: ★★

Theme Hospital

Publisher: **Bullfrog/Origin**
Developer: **Bullfrog**

A few years back, Bullfrog's Peter Molyneux (the man behind *Populous*) designed *Theme Park*. It was a pet project, one he worked on for years. Trouble was, as fun as parts of it were (designing rides), parts of it were plain boring: playing the stock market, and if you didn't pay close attention to the boring parts you'd eventually lose.



Peter Molyneux's little people are back and sick as dogs in the challenging and funny Theme Hospital

So think of *Theme Hospital* as all of the good parts with none of the boring clatter. The idea is to build and run a series of increasingly large hospitals, which cure such odd ailments as "bloated head" and "king complex" (patients believe they're Elvis). Space and money are allotted for diagnostic equipment, treatment facilities, research, training, and even such details as bathrooms, employees' lounges, and emergency benches for waiting patients. Once staff are hired, they go about their jobs independently (although it is possible to pick up a specific doctor, for example, and drop him where he's needed—and yes, all the doctors are male, so "PC" this ain't). The result is a pleasantly bustling game environment, complete with the relevant sounds.

The quality of humor is what we've come to expect from Bullfrog—good for a chuckle, with occasional brilliance ("Patients are reminded to please refrain from dying in the hallways"). The level of challenge ramps up at a nice, even rate, and in later stages, players have to worry about epidemics and curing an increasingly obscure range of conditions.

The main disappointment is the lack of multiplayer options. Part of the challenge within the game is to build a hospital faster and better than other computer-controlled facilities. How difficult would it have been to allow replacing them with human players?

That small detail aside, *Theme Hospital* is a rollicking good time and highly recommended.

Rating: ★★★★★

Macintosh

Damage Incorporated

Publisher: **MacSoft**
Developer: **Paranoid Productions**

Paranoid Productions's latest game for the Mac is *Damage Incorporated*, yet another first-person shooter based on the *Marathon* II engine. *Paranoid's* first game for the Mac was *Odyssée*, an RPG in the *Ultima* tradition, so *Damage Incorporated* is big switch for the developer, but an entertaining one. The good news for Mac owners with older 68040 systems is that *Damage Incorporated's* modest hardware needs don't require a PowerPC.

It's a *Marathon* clone, so players know what performance and detail to expect, but *Damage Incorporated* excels in the novelty of its gameplay. While running around shooting things, players command up to four other marines to run around and kill more things, similar to Games Workshop's *Warhammer* titles like *Space Hulk*. Early levels don't require much strategy, so the platoon doesn't see much action, but before long the use of every marine is critical to success. The marines set up ambushes, explore other

parts of the map, provide cover fire, or form a killing V wing behind the player as they mop up the opposition. While executing orders, they report back on what they've found or what areas they've cleared.

Damage Incorporated is built on old technology, and the *Marathon* clone is getting to be a tired genre. But this game manages to pull off several tricks that make it feel fresh again. Level design is good, commanding the marines is a great addition, and network play is fast. If you enjoy first-person shooters, you're going to find a lot to like about this.

Rating: ★★★★★



It's another Marathon clone, but Damage Incorporated manages a few new wrinkles

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Arcade

Dark Stalkers: Jedah's Damnation

Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **Capcom**

Possibly the best reason to like the *Dark Stalkers* series is because anything can happen. Characters morph into hypnotic bee-fighters or human blowfish, and nursery rhyme characters such as Goldilocks whip out AK 47s and mow down opponents.

Dark Stalkers: Jedah's Damnation (DS3) brings the series to three,

continuing the gorgeous animation and hybrid, funky-mythological characters that wowed us in the past (16 characters in all), under which hums the deep, 2D fighting engine that has made Capcom famous. The CPSII board is used, not the *Street Fighter III* powering CPSIII, as had been rumored. The same six-button mechanics are back, although there's a new life meter that actually enables players to earn back health as they fight. Also, bouts are fought with a life cycle system similar to that of *Killer Instinct*, with players fighting one long



The latest in the *Darkstalkers* series, *Jedah's Damnation* is good, but more of the same

bout with reduced health after one is knocked down, as opposed to *Dark Stalkers*'s more traditional method of completely replenishing life meters between rounds.

Chain combos, advancing guards, and a slew of killer moves for each character flesh out the game in a set-up we've all become familiar with, and the game has its moments, but this series has so far reached its zenith in *NightStalkers*. DS3 is more of the same—it's fun, but nothing special.

Rating: ★★★

Arcade

Magic Number

Street Fighter III

Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **Capcom**



With a roster almost entirely populated by new characters, expanded move sets, and the smoothest 2D animation ever, there's quite a lot to like about *Street Fighter III*

Well, lookit here. Capcom can count to three. After 11 *Street Fighter II* updates, *Street Fighter III* finally arrives. Guess what? It's a 2D fighter!

The smoothest-looking 2D fighter yet, *SFIII* pushes 2D hardware limits like nothing before. Working with 80MB RAM, and allotting even simple animations (like fireballs) 14 frames, *SFIII* looks like a living, breathing Japanese cartoon. This is an impressive achievement, because in spite of all the animation frames, character responsiveness is still efficient and speedy.

Looks aren't everything though, and the new qualities of *SFIII* aren't so clear-cut. In fact, the game hasn't moved much farther up the fighting scale than *SF Alpha*. An offensive block and Super Art Moves have been added, and the unusual Custom Combo is replaced by the more familiar Super Combo. The

offensive block takes some time to master. It's effective against fireballs and straight-forward attacks but unrealistic at times, and in the long run it may not last too long in the *SF* move pantheon.

The Super Art Moves, which require gamers to choose a super move before a fight, are cool, but the concept seems limiting. Why can't players have all three? Opponents can see which one is chosen, and it's ultimately more of a gimmick than anything else.

The new characters are really the big deal. Only Ryu and Ken return to join the new generation, with nine new ones jumping aboard. Already, Alex, Yun and Yang, Ibuki, and Sean have become favorites, while Oro, a foul-looking one-armed man, and Elena, a capoeira-style woman, are somewhat odd. Dudley, the black, English boxer, and Necro, the Frankenstein Russian lab experiment, are also new, but their

Capcom finally learns to count to "three," and it was worth the wait... mostly



presence is somehow hauntingly familiar (remember Balrog and Blanka?). On the whole, however, the new characters are generally well balanced.

The great mystery is why Capcom called this *SFIII* instead of leaving that honor for a more powerful and revolutionary 3D title. Gameplay in the *SF* series reached the ceiling of 2D possibilities a while ago, and as good as this game admittedly is, besides the stunning graphics there's little to distinguish it from the 11 games before.

Rating: ★★★★

rating

Mace

Publisher: Williams/Atari Games

Developer: Atari Games

A 3D fighter with both primitive and complex qualities, *Mace* stands a good chance in the most competitive arcade niche. It's relatively deep and good-looking, moves in full 3D, and has a sense of humor. It's the kind of game you'd bring home to Mom — except for the decapitations.

Mace uses a fighting system that's a collage of moves from the *Street Fighter*, *Mortal Kombat*, *Tekken*, and

Virtua Fighter series. That's quite a mouthful, but from this mixture, the Atari Games team has pulled off a weapon-based fighter that's full of chain combos, holding spells, and killer throws — all skill-based and in a full 3D environment. What it's lacking is the subtlety and the sprinkling of tiny details that make its more high-powered rivals so untouchable, that's what we mean when we say it is slightly "primitive."

Still, the game manages its share of touches, like dangerous borders on each arena (lava, acidic water, spiked floors, and so on). The highly detailed appearance of each character (ten, plus



Mace is a new 3D brawler that's so impressive, it can almost stand with the big boys

two bosses) is impressive, as is the simple four-button control scheme and the player's ability to evade in 3D. However, while evading and side-stepping into 3D works well enough, it's not fully realized in the fighting. It's not that quick or always that effective, and players can easily finish a whole match without using it.

Detail and depth on the order of a *Virtua Fighter* take years of development and practice, and Atari Games has a good start. *Mace* is a beautifully designed game with attractive characters and bodes well for *Mace II*.

Rating: ★★★

ng

Arcade

Older but Wiser

Tekken 3

Publisher: Namco

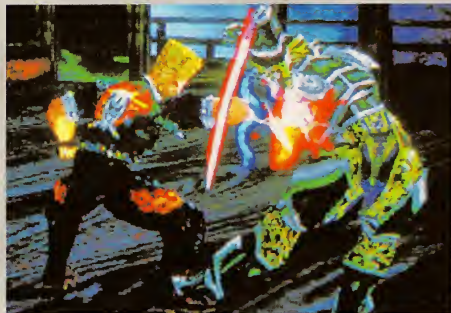
Developer: Namco Japan

Namco has proved itself again, and *Tekken 3* comes very close to matching *Virtua Fighter 3* as the premier 3D fighting game. While it may not look a whole lot different from its predecessor at first glance, a whole lot has changed (and strangely enough, a whole lot has stayed the same, too). With five entirely new characters, new moves, combos and throws, players will be digging into their pockets for some time. But the combo-rich fighting system is still one of the best ever.

Characters like Eddy, a South American capoeira-style fighter, show how good *Tekken*'s combo system can be in 3D and demonstrate the best qualities of *Tekken 3*. Eddy's flashy moves originate from an Afro-



Namco builds on its success and its hardware for a brawler that slams



Tekken 3 shows the series moving along its own evolutionary path into a brilliant future. Since the game is so highly detailed and proves a snap to control, devotees will be sure to eat it up

Brazilian dancing/fighting style that has him swinging his legs in scissor moves, flipping into handstands, breakdancing, and using combos in full 3D. Now characters also can side-step, as well as perform combos in 3D, and no other game touches *Tekken*'s four- or even five-part bone breaking throws. What's even better is that all of the *Tekken 3* characters look amazing, and prove Namco is capable of creating brilliant realism even on its somewhat humble System 12 board.

The System 12 board — one-and-one-half times faster than the System 11 board — produces a fantastic frame rate, resulting in character responsiveness that's chilling for a polygonal fighter. *Tekken 3* benefits from a technique known as envelope processing, which makes joints like knees and elbows smoother, a process which pushes this latest *Tekken* farther from the blocky, origami look that's dogged it in past years. Backgrounds are finally made up of 3D polygons, instead of the 2D bitmaps of the past, and the level of shading, detail, and depth in each helps to create a strong identity and atmosphere for the game.

Tekken 3 isn't quite the artful masterpiece that its direct competitor is, but is still awesome in its own right, and has moved the series even further from its "me too" roots. The fighting system has evolved nicely, resulting in some wild and effective moves and new characters, a faster responsiveness, and an impressive 3D fighting experience.

Rating: ★★★★★

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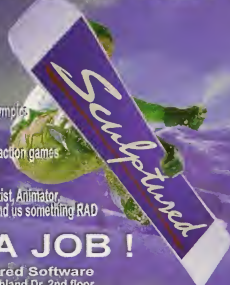
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Write to the point

I was disgusted to read in May about Arizona's SB 1433. I find this legislation (and all others like it) a reinforcement of the trend toward passiveness and laziness that seems to permeate this country. Let me dispel misconceptions that may be running through Senator Lieberman's mind (and yours) right now: I am a 37-year-old married mother of two — a boy age 10 and a girl age 7.

I have loved videogames ever since I first saw *Pong*, and we currently have a PC, Saturn, and Genesis with the 32X and CD attachments. Much to my husband's disdain and the astonishment of my kids' friends, the Genesis setup is mine, and I play whenever I get a chance. We own numerous violent games, but I also make sure we have others. Our puzzle games and cutesy character games get as much play as *Doom*, *MK*, and *Primal Rage*.

I admit I may be an anomaly, but I watch, play with, or at least listen to my kids playing these games. They cheer, grunt, groan,



Ban this game? Not surprisingly, our readers say "No"

yell, laugh, and argue. They discuss how they could do better, what's wrong with the game, and so on. These thoughtful discussions would not happen if they were reading or watching TV.

I will not buy my children certain games right now because they lack the emotional maturity,

but this doesn't mean that in a few years (with parental input) they won't be playing them. I can't say this enough: I have the first, last, and only word on what games come into my house. I have several games for the PC that I will not play while the children are around.

I found the Professor Jenkins interview very interesting in that he has many of the same views I have. My yard is the size of a postage stamp; the nearest park is a mile away, and my children are not old enough to be out running the streets for eight hours a day without supervision as I did at that age. I do not believe it is healthy to try to control a child's actions 24 hours a day. It is not their fault there are fewer and fewer places they can go and just be children. I wish there were, but I also remember what it was like to be that age. Children can be vicious little animals when left completely alone. (Perhaps Senator Lieberman should reread *Lord of the Flies*.)

I have long held the belief, and Professor Jenkins seems to dance around it, that videogames give children an emotional outlet and a sense of accomplishment that they may not have otherwise. Years ago, only the school athletes were looked up to. If you did not have the build and coordination to be on the football team or any other school sport team, there wasn't how you could do that would be considered noteworthy by your peers (excelling at schoolwork usually got you beaten up).

Videogames (especially in arcades) give anybody the chance to beat the team quarter-back and steal the limelight. I remember the feeling after playing *Q*bert* in a arcade for eight hours on a single quarter with everybody standing around cheering. It was great, and I see the same feelings in my

children when they beat a game, perform a difficult move, or finally get past a level that has been bothersome. They also seem better able to handle frustration. They may step away from the game for a while, look in magazines for hints, go the Internet, and ask each other for help, but they find a way to solve the problem and continue the game. How many of my generation gave up on math when they were having problems with algebra? I know I did.

I feel that videogames have more positives to offer than negatives. Like any other tool, games must be used properly. As with anything, parents must make active choices and be prepared to interact with their children. You don't have to play the game to do that. When they yell for you to come and watch this cool new move they learned, go — the dishes can wait 10 more minutes.

The day I am required to turn over the privilege of raising my children to the state (you'll have to find me first and I guarantee it won't be easy), I will expect a check for 100% of the costs I have incurred in raising them.

**S. Marois
(e-mail withheld by request)**

Well put.

I am writing with regard to your article "Is Nintendo 64 Breaking Up?" in **NG 29**. While I understand and in some cases agree with many of the criticisms given, part of the article left me with a very foul taste in my mouth.

I'm speaking of the line "However, in the end, games such as *Shadows of the Empire*, *Killer Instinct Gold*, *NBA Hangtime*, *Doom 64*, and *Wayne Gretzky Hockey* are little more than highly marketable B and C titles." While I have not

had the opportunity to play all of the titles listed, your outright branding of both *KI Gold* and *Doom 64* appears to me to be both unjustified and ill-thought.

Regarding *KI Gold*, you should know for the record that there are many people out there who actually enjoy solid 2D fighting games. Just because a fighter is composed of sprite animations instead of motion-captured polygonal meshes does not make it inherently weak. In *KI Gold's* case, you also forget that, for *Killer Instinct*, no other adequate port of the arcade version is available to consumers. The only other retail *KI* version available has been for the Super NES, and the 16-bit downgrade made it comparatively weak versus the real thing. The Nintendo 64 version, on the other hand, is closer to its original counterpart and in some ways an improvement. If you insist on continuing to bash *KI Gold* as a poor product, then please tell me where I might find a version close to the arcade that doesn't require me shelling out 50 cents a round.

As for *Doom 64*, it appears you're once again missing the point. Yes they could have added polygonal enemies. Yes they could have added jumping. Yes they could have added looking up and down, or even a horde of other features that you might require to make it feel less "dated." But something has to be said for a classic game. *Doom* is a modern gaming icon, arguably just as much as *Mario* is. But unlike *Mario*, an icon by character, *Doom* is an icon by technology. If those extra features were added, it would cease to be *Doom* and instead be some (for lack of a better term) bastard child of *Doom* and *Quake*. I don't want that, and I doubt many gamers who remember what they

corresponding



Think about it: Are these games really good enough for N64?

felt like three and one-half years ago during that first night playing the original, want that. Not to mention that for some gamers out there who haven't had access to a PC and have to contend with weaker console versions, this could be their first real "Dooming" experience. Judging by how the game has influenced the industry, I wouldn't consider that a non-issue.

Before deciding to trash games that you feel are inadequate, I would appreciate it if you'd give more thought regarding what you're trashing, including asking why the game exists. Sometimes (and admittedly quite often) it's pure marketability, but with these titles I don't agree it was, and there are certainly more games out there with similar motivations behind them.

For the most part I can honestly say I enjoy your magazine every month. In general it's a professional, insightful, and well-written magazine. Keep up the good work, but when criticizing well-known products as ferociously as this, remember to take all the factors into account.

Chris Hargrove
Technology Programmer
Raven Software
chargrove@mail.ravensoft.com

Thanks Chris, but we would still argue that *Killer Instinct*, true to the arcade or not, is just not a very good game — 2D or 3D. As for

Doom, your point is well taken, but neither game really takes advantage of what N64 can offer. With so few games available, we feel that, although porting such "safe" games to the console may be smart from a marketing perspective (which is why the games appeared on N64), they don't fulfill the promise of Nintendo's 64-bit technology; they're less than we expected.

I just finished *NG 29* and after reading the interview with Howard Lincoln, I have one thing to say, B.S. Quality not quantity is B.S. when there is no quality.

Even the Jaguar had more good games (although more often than not they were better doorstops). And that's exactly what each and every of the aforementioned N64 games are, \$80 doorstops.

He says these games are revolutionary? Why doesn't he sit through one painful session of *Cruis'n USA*? Luckily I rented it, if I had actually paid \$80 for that pile of crap, I'd probably have hunted down the creators and shot them.

Thomas Lomino

Thanks Thomas, we think. Look, given the current debate about videogames and violence, we'd just as soon you *not* go shoot developers, even if you do buy a crappy game. Just the same, this response does express the anger that many gamers are feeling toward Nintendo right now.

I think your article was unfair, although you make a number of valid points. I have been extremely disappointed with certain releases — *Cruis'n USA* and *NBA Hangtime* in particular. In fact, I was extremely upset to have paid for those cartridges. I'm glad I didn't rush out and buy *Doom 64*, with its unacceptable animation. Even *Shadows of the Empire* was also not the be-all-and-end-all that I had hoped for. Although the graphics were great, the motion was anything but smooth — that was a little disappointing after *Super Mario 64*.

But you didn't even mention *Turok*, for example. That has to be the best game in its class ever. In my opinion, it rivals *Super Mario 64* for your "best videogame ever" title. I just don't see anything that even comes close. Games like that show that Nintendo 64 certainly deserves its reputation as the best gaming machine ever.

Every system has horrible games. So the only real problem, in my opinion, is not the lack of quality games but the lack of any games available for Nintendo 64. The quality is there; the quantity is not. And it appears that this will be more or less solved by Christmas. I admit, this is an aggravatingly long time to wait. But when you compare the quality, it's well worth the wait.

Julian Velasco
VelascoJulian@worldnet.att.net

We're glad that you enjoyed *Turok* so much, but we feel you may have missed the point of the article — Nintendo has thus far failed live up to the promises they made to consumers, namely that quantity didn't matter, because the quality would always be there. In short, Nintendo tried to tell everyone that there wouldn't be low quality games for the system when in fact, the majority of games released thus far have been average or below average.

What's up with the Nintendo bashing? I've never seen a negative story in your magazine about any other platform. [Three paragraphs of wild ranting deleted — ed.] You guys are obviously biased. Cancel my subscription!

Charles V. Irving
Johnson City, TN

We have never given any platform a free ride. Case in point: our two-part feature, "What's Wrong with the PC?" in *NG 3* and *NG 4* (FYI: things got better for the PC, and we certainly hope they do for Nintendo 64 as well.) Or our annual platform comparison feature every December (which appeared *NG 12* and *NG 24*). Subscription cancelled.

I was wondering if you guys could help me with a little problem! I have run into. Some of the older games that have battery backup are going dead on me. Where do I go to get the backup batteries replaced? Should I contact Nintendo and Sega directly? Or should I go through the game companies (for games like *Shadowgate* and *Deja Vu*)?

I probably could take apart and replace the batteries myself if the parts are sold at an electronics store, but I would rather have it done professionally if possible to avoid damage and the loss of my *Phantasy Star* game saves.

Wes Lawrence
Lawrencw@mailserv1.ferris.edu

You'll probably lose the games if you change the battery (which are often soldered onto the circuit board). As for how to change the battery, can anyone who's tried it help Wes out?

Not that this really has anything to do with videogames, but I was just wondering if you had seen that fantastic new movie *Grosse Pointe Blank*? If so, you no doubt noticed that the *UltiMart* clerk was playing an arcade game... *Doom*!!! Is this just a prop, or was there really a *Doom* arcade? I've never heard of one, but this certainly appeared to be a true working *Doom* arcade! It used a normal arcade joystick and what seemed to be two or three buttons. Anyone ever seen one of these? I'm intrigued now!

Patrick Bass
Hotarubi@juno.com

Patrick, welcome to the magic of Hollywood. While it's possible that people may have put *Doom* in an arcade cabinet for fun, there was never an official arcade version of *Doom* or *Doom II*. Still, at least *Grosse Pointe* almost brings Hollywood up to date — *The Net* showed Sandra Bullock cleaning a virus out of a "new, cutting edge game" that turned out to be *Wolfenstein 3D*. And they say the Hollywood/Games connection hasn't paid off.

Next Month

Too Late To Rally?

In the August issue, **Next Generation** gets inside Sega of Japan for a look at its most promising titles and interviews with the key designers eager to make a difference.

What's next for Sega?
Find out next month

Next Generation #32
on sale July 22, 1997.

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And if you plan to survive, you're going to have to battle the enemy with your agile wits. Uncover the powers that lie deep in the ruins. Discover what it



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Saturn strategy guide

EDITORIAL SUPPLEMENT TO NEXT GENERATION



So you want to rule the Saturn roost, huh? Well, we'd like to help you out. This month, we'll help you get through *Daytona USA CCE*, *Soviet Strike*, *Die Hard Arcade*, *Manx TT*, *Mega Man 8*, *Command & Conquer*, *Impact Racing*, and *Super Puzzle Fighter 2 Turbo*. You'll be the best Saturn gamer in your neighborhood. Do you have any helpful hints that we should know about? We want to hear your gaming insights. Please e-mail them to us at ngonline@imagine-inc.com. Fax us at 415 468 4686. Mail us at **Next Generation** Tips, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, California 94005

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Inside Die Hard Arcade

Basic Moves

Punch	P
Kick	K
Jump	J
Low Punch	D+P
Low Kick	D+K
Run	Tap and hold
Grab	Touch any enemy
Uppercut	Hold F+PPP
Foot Sweep	Hold F+PPK

Turning Attacks

Backfist	P+hold B or F
Side Kick	K+hold B or F

Special Moves

Vertical Back Kick	PPPK
Jumping Back Spinning Kick	PPPPK
Stun Palm	hold P, release
Backflip Kick	hold K, release
Leap Kick	Run + K
Tackle	Run + P
Dragon Uppercut	P+J
Dashing Elbow	P+J (D-pad Left or Right)

Special With Grab

Shove Over	K,K,K
German Suplex	PPK,K,K
Giant Swing	PK,P
Mad Dog	K,PK
Reverse Armlock Throw	B+P
Shoulder Throw	B+K
Pile Driver	K,PPPPK
High Charging Elbow	PPP
Frankensteiner	J,P
Launch Kick	J,K

Jumping Attacks

Shoulder Slam	J,D+P
Knee Slam	J,D+K
Double Jump Back Kick	Hold B or F,K+J
Spinning Attack	P,K+J
Double Hammerfist	J,Hold P
Jump Kick	J+K
Drill Kick	J, hold K

Specials With Weapons

Handgun or machine gun

Fire	P
Crouch and Fire	D+P
Kick	K
Fire diagonally down	J,P
Turn and Shoot	B+P
Dragon gun uppercut	P+J
Handcuff arrest	Grab,PP
Hogie arrest	Grab,K,K
Double Kick head smash	K,K,P
Double Sweep Uppercut	Hold D,K,K,P

Broom, Pipe, and Robot Leg

Triple Spin High	PPP
Down Up crosswire	K,K,K
Crossbar Rising Jab	D+P
Low Sweep	D+K
Pole Vault	Run +K
Joust Attack	Run + P
Dragon Pole Uppercut	P+J
Jump Forward Sweep	f,f+K

Axe, Knife, and Bottle

Jab	P
Slash	K
Triple Poke	PPP
Low Triple Slash	K,K,K
Low Slice	D+K
Super Drop	J,D+P
Dragon Ax Upper	P+J

Missile Launcher

Fire	P
Kick	K
Turnaround Swing	B+P

Anti-tank Rifle

Fire	P
Downward swing	K
Turnaround Swing	B+P

Saturn Codes

Manx TT

by Sega

Sheep Mode

At the 'Select Transmission' screen, press Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Z, Y. A sheep sound will indicate that the code was entered correctly. When the game begins, the player will be riding a sheep and all opponents will be sheep.

Super Bikes

Place first on each track in challenge mode to access three new super bikes.

Mega Man 8

by Capcom

Animation Test

To access the Animation Test and extra voices in the Voice Test mode, highlight 'Bonus Mode' on the start screen. Then, hold Down the Left Shoulder Button and the Right Shoulder Button simultaneously and press START. The animation test will now be available to watch all the FMV segments in the game (including the ending). The Voice Test will also have voices for all the Bosses, including Cutman and Woodman.

Impact Racing

by Acclaim

Invincibility - For an indestructible car, enter the password 'I.A.M.I.MORTAL'.

Unlimited Ammo - The password 'LOADSOFSTUFF' grants unlimited ammo for any weapons acquired.

Command & Conquer

by Westwood Studios

Enter these codes anytime during gameplay

Nuclear Bomb Code - A, B, C, Left, Down, Right, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up, A

Ion Cannon Code - A, B, C, Left, Down, Right, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up, B

Air Strike Code - A, B, C, Left, Down, Right, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up, C

Money Code - Right, Left, A, B, C, Z, Y, X, Right, Left

Map Code - Up, Down, Right, Left, A, Up, Down, Right, Left, A

Laser Code - X, Y, Z, Right, Down, Left, Up, Right, Down, Left, Up, X

(Note: For this code to work, the player must have the Orca VTOL (helicopter). Instead of shooting missiles, the VTOL craft will now shoot two red lasers like the Obelisk Tower.)

Build Up Code - Y, A, B, B, A, Down, A, B, B, A, Down, Up (Yabba Dabba Du)

(Note: The player must possess a power plant and barracks for this code to work. Use the code to periodically access more buildings, units, and vehicles throughout a battle.)

Visceroid Code - C, Right, A, Z, Y, B, Up, B, B, A (Crazy Bubba)

(Note: This code will allow the player to build a toxic lab in order to build a Visceroid.)

bGreat Wall' Cheat - If the enemy is constantly sending units to attack a base, build a sand bag wall FULLY SURROUNDING the enemy's base.

The AI will not progress further than the wall, and therefore the enemy will be unable to attack or get tiberium. Build up forces for one mass attack to destroy the enemy.



Saturn Codes

Super Puzzle Fighter 2 Turbo

by Capcom

Secret Characters

Play as Dan

Player One: Place the highlight cursor on Morrigan. Hold START and press Left, Left, Left, Down, Down, Down, A.

Player Two: Place the highlight cursor on Felicia. Hold START and press Right, Right, Right, Down, Down, Down, A.

Play as Akuma

Player One: Place the highlight cursor on Morrigan. Hold START and press Down, Down, Down, Left, Left, Left, A.

Player Two: Place the highlight cursor on Felicia. Hold START and press Down, Down, Down, Right, Right, Right, A.

Play as Devilote

Player One: Place the highlight cursor on Morrigan. Hold START and press Left, Left, Left, Down, Down, Down. Keep holding START, wait for the timer to hit 10 and press A.

Player Two: Place the highlight cursor on Felicia. Hold START and press Right, Right, Right, Down, Down, Down. Keep holding START, wait for the timer to hit 10 and press A.

Play as Hsien-Ko's Sister

Player One: Place the highlight cursor on Morrigan. Hold START, move one character to the right and press A.

Player Two: Place the highlight cursor on Felicia. Hold START, move two characters to the left and press A.

Play as Anita

Player One: Place the highlight cursor on Morrigan. Hold START, move two characters to the right and press A.

Player Two: Place the highlight cursor on Felicia. Hold START, move one character to the left and press A.

Play against CPU Devilote

To play against Devilote in a one player game, meet the following criteria:

No continuing before Stage 7.

Defeat an opponent within one minute.

Create at least one super combo.

Have a Maximum Chain of 4 or more.

Maximum power gem must be at least 20 units.

Daytona USA CCE

by Sega

Taxi Code

To Race as a yellow New York Taxi Cab, enter the following code on the Orange Light at the start of the race in arcade mode: C, A, B

Soviet Strike

by Electronic Arts

Strike It Rich

Level Passwords

Crimea	MAR0Z
Black Sea	KRAZHA
Khyber	VERBLUD
Dracula	YADRO
Kremlin	PERIWOROT

Secret Codes

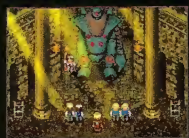
Unlimited fuel	COLDPZZA
1 extra life	FREEBIE
4 extra lives	VOODOO
4X weapon power	GABRIEL
Fuel consumption at 1/2 speed	ALBATROSS

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